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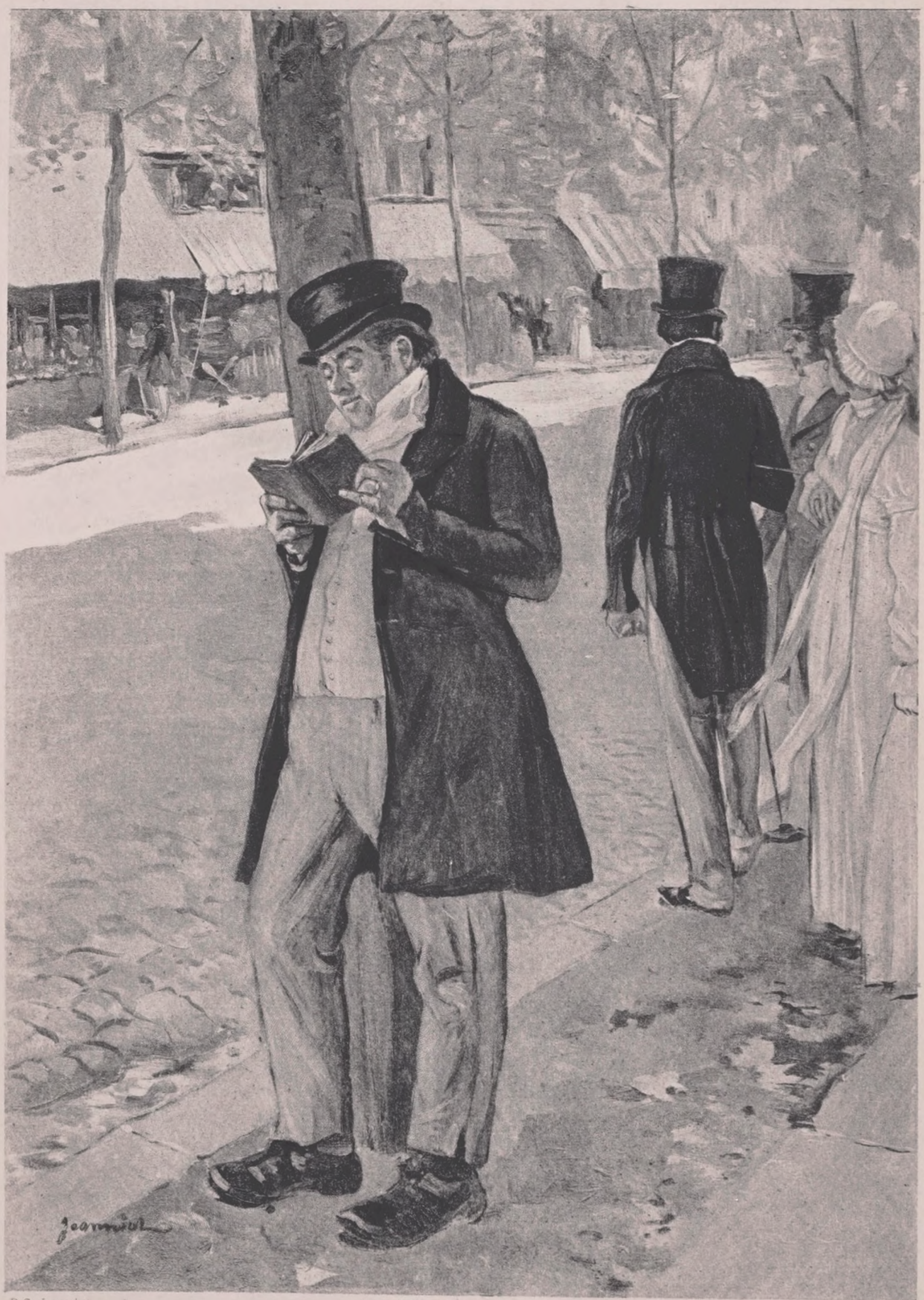
CENTENARY EDITION

VOLUME XV.

CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

NUCINGEN AND CO.

ANOTHER STUDY OF WOMAN



P. G. Jeanniot

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Scenes from Parisian Life

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

OF

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

TRANSLATED BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

NUCINGEN AND CO., BANKERS

ANOTHER STUDY OF WOMAN

Illustrated by

P. G. JEANNIOT

Cesar Birotteau.

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1915

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THE RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

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Designed by P. G. JEANNIOT.

RISE AND FALL

OF

CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

PART I.

CÉSAR AT HIS APOGÉE.

I.

During winter nights noise never ceases in the Rue Saint-Honoré except for a short interval. Kitchen-gardeners carrying their produce to market continue the stir of carriages returning from theatres and balls. Near the middle of this sustained pause in the grand symphony of Parisian uproar, which occurs about one o'clock in the morning, the wife of Monsieur César Birotteau, a perfumer established near the Place Vendôme, was startled from her sleep by a frightful dream. She had seen her double. She had appeared to herself clothed in rags, turning with a shrivelled, withered hand the latch of her own shop-door, seeming to be at the threshold, yet at the same time seated in her armchair behind the counter. She was asking alms of herself, and heard herself speaking from the doorway and also from her seat at the desk.

She tried to grasp her husband, but her hand fell on a cold place. Her terror became so intense that she could not move her neck, which stiffened as if petrified; the membranes of her throat became glued together, her voice failed her. She remained sitting erect in the same posture in the middle of the alcove, both panels of which were wide open, her eyes staring and fixed, her hair quivering, her ears filled with strange noises, her heart tightened yet palpitating, and her person bathed in perspiration though chilled to the bone.

Fear is a half-diseased sentiment, which presses so violently upon the human mechanism that the faculties are suddenly excited to the highest degree of their power or driven to utter disorganization. Physiologists have long wondered at this phenomenon, which overturns their systems and upsets all theories; it is in fact a thunderbolt working within the being, and, like all electric accidents, capricious and whimsical in its course. This explanation will become a mere commonplace in the day when scientific men are brought to recognize the immense part which electricity plays in human thought.

Madame Birotteau now passed through several of the shocks, in some sort electrical, which are produced by terrible explosions of the will forced out, or held under, by some mysterious mechanism. Thus during a period of time, very short if judged by a watch, but immeasurable when calculated by the rapidity of her impressions, the poor woman had the supernatural power of emitting more ideas and bringing to the surface more recollections than, under any ordinary use of her faculties, she could put forth in the course of a whole day. The poignant tale of her monologue may be abridged

into a few absurd sentences, as contradictory and bare of meaning as the monologue itself.

"There is no reason why Birotteau should leave my bed! He has eaten so much veal that he may be ill. But if he were ill he would have waked me. For nineteen years that we have slept together in this bed, in this house, it has never happened that he left his place without telling me, — poor sheep! He never slept away except to pass the night in the guard-room. Did he come to bed to-night? Why, of course; goodness! how stupid I am."

She cast her eyes upon the bed and saw her husband's night-cap, which still retained the almost conical shape of his head.

"Can he be dead? Has he killed himself? Why?" she went on. "For the last two years, since they made him deputy-mayor, he is *all-I-don't-know-how*. To put him into public life! On the word of an honest woman, is n't it pitiable? His business is doing well, for he gave me a shawl. But perhaps it is n't doing well? Bah! I should know of it. Does one ever know what a man has got in his head; or a woman either? — there is no harm in that. Did n't we sell five thousand francs' worth to-day? Besides, a deputy-mayor could n't kill himself; he knows the laws too well. Where is he then?"

She could neither turn her neck, nor stretch out her hand to pull the bell, which would have put in motion a cook, three clerks, and a shop-boy. A prey to the nightmare, which still lasted though her mind was wide awake, she forgot her daughter peacefully asleep in an adjoining room, the door of which opened at the foot of

her bed. At last she cried, "Birotteau!" but got no answer. She thought she had called the name aloud, though in fact she had only uttered it mentally.

"Has he a mistress? He is too stupid," she added. "Besides, he loves me too well for that. Did n't he tell Madame Roguin that he had never been unfaithful to me, even in thought? He is virtue upon earth, that man. If any one ever deserved paradise he does. What does he accuse himself of to his confessor, I wonder? He must tell him a lot of fiddle-faddle. Royalist as he is, though he does n't know why, he can't froth up his religion. Poor dear cat! he creeps to Mass at eight o'clock as slyly as if he were going to a bad house. He fears God for God's sake; hell is nothing to him. How could he have a mistress? He is so tied to my petticoat that he bores me. He loves me better than his own eyes; he would put them out for my sake. For nineteen years he has never said to me one word louder than another. His daughter is never considered before me. But Césarine is here — Césarine! Césarine! — Birotteau has never had a thought which he did not tell me. He was right enough when he declared to me at the Petit-Matelot that I should never know him till I tried him. And *not here!* It is extraordinary!"

She turned her head with difficulty and glanced furtively about the room, then filled with those picturesque effects which are the despair of language and seem to belong exclusively to the painters of genre. What words can picture the alarming zig-zags produced by falling shadows, the fantastic appearance of curtains bulged out by the wind, the flicker of uncertain light thrown by a night-lamp upon the folds of red calico,

the rays shed from a curtain-holder whose lurid centre was like the eye of a burglar, the apparition of a kneeling dress, — in short, all the grotesque effects which terrify the imagination at a moment when it has no power except to foresee misfortunes and exaggerate them? Madame Birotteau suddenly saw a strong light in the room beyond her chamber, and thought of fire; but perceiving a red foulard which looked like a pool of blood, her mind turned exclusively to burglars, especially when she thought she saw traces of a struggle in the way the furniture stood about the room. Recollecting the sum of money which was in the desk, a generous fear put an end to the chill ferment of her nightmare. She sprang terrified, and in her night-gown, into the very centre of the room to help her husband, whom she supposed to be in the grasp of assassins.

"Birotteau! Birotteau!" she cried at last in a voice full of anguish.

She then saw the perfumer in the middle of the next room, a yard-stick in his hand measuring the air, and so ill wrapped up in his green cotton dressing-gown with chocolate-colored spots that the cold had reddened his legs without his feeling it, preoccupied as he was. When César turned about to say to his wife, "Well, what do you want, Constance?" his air and manner, like those of a man absorbed in calculations, were so prodigiously silly that Madame Birotteau began to laugh.

"Goodness! César, if you are not an oddity like that!" she said. "Why did you leave me alone without telling me? I have nearly died of terror; I did

not know what to imagine. What are you doing there, flying open to all the winds? You 'll get as hoarse as a wolf. Do you hear me, Birotteau?"

"Yes, wife, here I am," answered the perfumer, coming into the bedroom.

"Come and warm yourself, and tell me what maggot you 've got in your head," replied Madame Birotteau opening the ashes of the fire, which she hastened to relight. "I am frozen. What a goose I was to get up in my night-gown! But I really thought they were assassinating you."

The shopkeeper put his candlestick on the chimney-piece, wrapped his dressing-gown closer about him, and went mechanically to find a flannel petticoat for his wife.

"Here, Mimi, cover yourself up," he said. "Twenty-two by eighteen," he resumed, going on with his monologue; "we can get a superb salon."

"Ah, çà! Birotteau, are you on the high-road to insanity? Are you dreaming?"

"No, wife, I am calculating."

"You had better wait till daylight for your nonsense," she cried, fastening the petticoat beneath her short night-gown and going to the door of the room where her daughter was in bed.

"Césarine is asleep," she said, "she won't hear us. Come, Birotteau, speak up. What is it?"

"We can give a ball."

"Give a ball! we? On the word of an honest woman, you are dreaming, my dear friend."

"I am not dreaming, my beautiful white doe. Listen. People should always do what their position in life

demands. Government has brought me forward into prominence. I belong to the government; it is my duty to study its mind, and further its intentions by developing them. The Duc de Richelieu has just put an end to the occupation of France by the foreign armies. According to Monsieur de la Billardière, the functionaries who represent the city of Paris should make it their duty, each in his own sphere of influence, to celebrate the liberation of our territory. Let us show a true patriotism which shall put these liberals, these damned intriguers, to the blush; hein? Do you think I don't love my country? I wish to show the liberals, my enemies, that to love the king is to love France."

"Do you think you have got any enemies, my poor Birotteau?"

"Why, yes, wife, we have enemies. Half our friends in the quarter are our enemies. They all say, 'Birotteau has had luck; Birotteau is a man who came from nothing: yet here he is deputy-mayor; everything succeeds with him.' Well, they are going to be finely surprised. You are the first to be told that I am made a chevalier of the Legion of honor. The king signed the order yesterday."

"Oh! then," said Madame Birotteau, much moved, "of course we must give the ball, my good friend. But what have you done to merit the cross?"

"Yesterday, when Monsieur de la Billardière told me the news," said Birotteau, modestly, "I asked myself, as you do, what claims I had to it; but I ended by seeing what they were, and in approving the action of the government. In the first place, I am a royalist; I was

wounded at Saint-Roch in Vendémiaire: is n't it something to have borne arms in those days for the good cause? Then, according to the merchants, I exercised my judicial functions in a way to give general satisfaction. I am now deputy-mayor. The king grants four crosses to the municipality of Paris; the prefect, selecting among the deputies suitable persons to be thus decorated, has placed my name first on the list. The king moreover knows me: thanks to old Ragon. I furnish him with the only powder he is willing to use; we alone possess the receipt of the late queen, — poor, dear, august victim! The mayor vehemently supported me. So there it is. If the king gives me the cross without my asking for it, it seems to me that I cannot refuse it without failing in my duty to him. Did I seek to be deputy-mayor? So, wife, since we are sailing before the wind, as your uncle Pillerault says when he is jovial, I have decided to put the household on a footing in conformity with our high position. If I can become anything, I 'll risk being whatever the good God wills that I shall be, — sub-prefect, if such be my destiny. My wife, you are much mistaken if you think a citizen has paid his debt to his country by merely selling perfumery for twenty years to those who came to buy it. If the State demands the help of our intelligence, we are as much bound to give it as we are to pay the tax on personal property, on windows and doors, *et cætera*. Do you want to stay forever behind your counter? You have been there, thank God, a long time. This ball shall be our fête, — yours and mine. Good-by to economy, — for your sake, be it understood. I burn our sign, ' The Queen of Roses; ' I efface the name, ' César

Birotteau, Perfumer, Successor to Ragon,' and put simply 'Perfumery' in big letters of gold. On the *entresol* I place the office, the counting-room, and a pretty little sanctum for you. I make the shop out of the back-shop, the present dining-room, and kitchen. I hire the first floor of the next house, and open a door into it through the wall. I turn the staircase so as to pass from house to house on one floor; and we shall thus get a grand appartement, furnished like a nest. Yes, I shall refurnish your bedroom, and contrive a boudoir for you and a pretty chamber for Césarine. The shop-girl whom you will hire, our head clerk, and your lady's-maid (yes, Madame, you are to have one!) will sleep on the second floor. On the third will be the kitchen and rooms of the cook and the man-of-all-work. The fourth shall be a general store-house for bottles, crystals, and porcelains. The workshop for our people, in the attic! Passers-by shall no longer see them gumming on the labels, making the bags, sorting the flasks, and corking the phials. Very well for the Rue Saint-Denis, but for the Rue Saint-Honoré — fy! bad style! Our shop must be as comfortable as a drawing-room. Tell me, are we the only perfumers who have reached public honors? Are there not vinegar merchants and mustard men who command in the National Guard and are very well received at the Palace? Let us imitate them; let us extend our business, and at the same time press forward into higher society."

"Goodness! Birotteau, do you know what I am thinking of as I listen to you? You are like the man who looks for knots in a bulrush. Recollect what I said when it was a question of making you deputy-mayor:

'your peace of mind before everything!' You are as fit, I told you, 'to be put forward in public life as my arm is to turn a windmill. Honors will be your ruin!' You would not listen to me, and now the ruin has come. To play a part in politics you must have money: have we any? What! would you burn your sign, which cost six hundred francs, and renounce 'The Queen of Roses,' your true glory? Leave ambition to others. He who puts his hand in the fire gets burned, — is n't that true? Politics burn in these days. We have one hundred good thousand francs invested outside of our business, our productions, our merchandise. If you want to increase your fortune, do as they did in 1793. The Funds are at sixty-two: buy into the Funds. You will get ten thousand francs' income, and the investment won't hamper our property. Take advantage of the occasion to marry our daughter; sell the business, and let us go and live in your native place. Why! for fifteen years you have talked of nothing but buying Les Trésorières, that pretty little property near Chinon, where there are woods and fields, and ponds and vineyards, and two dairies, which bring in a thousand crowns a year, with a house which we both like, — all of which we can have for sixty thousand francs; and, lo! Monsieur now wants to become something under government! Recollect what we are, — perfumers. If sixteen years before you invented the Double Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm some one had said, 'You are going to make enough money to buy Les Trésorières,' would n't you have been half sick with joy? Well, you can acquire that property which you wanted so much that you hardly opened your mouth about anything else, and

now you talk of spending on nonsense money earned by the sweat of our brow: I can say ours, for I've sat behind the desk through all that time, like a poor dog in his kennel. Is n't it much better to come and visit our daughter after she is married to a notary of Paris, and live eight months of the year at Chinon, than to begin here to make five sous six blanks, and of six blanks nothing? Wait for a rise in the Funds, and you can give eight thousand francs a year to your daughter and we can keep two thousand for ourselves, and the proceeds of the business will allow us to buy Les Trésorières. There in your native place, my good little cat, with our furniture, which is worth a great deal, we shall live like princes; whereas here we want at least a million to make any figure at all."

"I expected you to say all this, wife," said César Birotteau. "I am not quite such a fool (though you think me a great fool, you do) as not to have thought of all that. Now, listen to me. Alexandre Crottat will fit us like a glove for a son-in-law, and he will succeed Roguin; but do you suppose he will be satisfied with a hundred thousand francs *dot?* — supposing that we gave our whole property outside of the business to establish our daughter, and I am willing; I would gladly live on dry bread the rest of my days to see her happy as a queen, the wife of a notary of Paris, as you say. Well, then, a hundred thousand francs, or even eight thousand francs a year, is nothing at all towards buying Roguin's practice. Little Xandrot, as we call him, thinks, like all the rest of the world, that we are richer than we are. If his father, that big farmer who is as close as a snail, won't sell a hundred thousand francs

worth of land Xandrot can't be a notary, for Roguin's practice is worth four or five hundred thousand. If Crottat does not pay half down, how could he negotiate the affair? Césarine must have two hundred thousand francs *dot;* and I mean that you and I shall retire solid bourgeois of Paris, with fifteen thousand francs a year. Hein! If I could make you see that as plain as day, would n't it shut your mouth?"

"Oh, if you 've got the mines of Peru —"

"Yes, I have, my lamb. Yes," he said, taking his wife by the waist and striking her with little taps, under an emotion of joy which lighted up his features, "I did not wish to tell you of this matter till it was all cooked; but to-morrow it will be done, — that is, perhaps it will. Here it is then: Roguin has proposed a speculation to me, so safe that he has gone into it with Ragon, with your uncle Pillerault, and two other of his clients. We are to buy property near the Madeleine, which, according to Roguin's calculations, we shall get for a quarter of the value which it will bring three years from now, at which time, the present leases having expired, we shall manage it for ourselves. We have all six taken certain shares. I furnish three hundred thousand francs, — that is, three-eighths of the whole. If any one of us wants money, Roguin will get it for him by hypothecating his share. To hold the gridiron and know how the fish are fried, I have chosen to be nominally proprietor of one half, which is, however, to be the common property of Pillerault and the worthy Ragon and myself. Roguin will be, under the name of Monsieur Charles Claparon, co-proprietor with me, and will give a reversionary deed to his associates, as I shall

to mine. The deeds of purchase are made by promises of sale under private seal, until we are masters of the whole property. Roguin will investigate as to which of the contracts should be paid in money, for he is not sure that we can dispense with registering and yet turn over the titles to those to whom we sell in small parcels. But it takes too long to explain all this to you. The ground once paid for, we have only to cross our arms and in three years we shall be rich by a million. Césarine will then be twenty, our business will be sold, and we shall step, by the grace of God, modestly to eminence."

"Where will you get your three hundred thousand francs?" said Madame Birotteau.

"You don't understand business, my beloved little cat. I shall take the hundred thousand francs which are now with Roguin; I shall borrow forty thousand on the buildings and gardens where we now have our manufactory in the Faubourg du Temple; we have twenty thousand francs here in hand, — in all, one hundred and sixty thousand. There remain one hundred and forty thousand more, for which I shall sign notes to the order of Monsieur Charles Claparon, banker. He will pay the value, less the discount. So there are the three hundred thousand francs provided for. He who owns rents owes nothing. When the notes fall due we can pay them off with our profits. If we cannot pay them in cash, Roguin will give the money at five per cent, hypothecated on my share of the property. But such loans will be unnecessary. I have discovered an essence which will make the hair grow, — an Oil Comagène, from Syria! Livingston has just

set up for me an hydraulic press to manufacture the oil from nuts, which yield it readily under strong pressure. In a year, according to my calculations, I shall have made a hundred thousand francs at least. I meditate an advertisement which shall begin, 'Down with wigs!' — the effect will be prodigious. You have never found out my wakefulness, Madame! For three months the success of Macassar Oil has kept me from sleeping. I am resolved to take the shine out of Macassar!"

"So these are the fine projects you've been rolling in your noddle for two months without choosing to tell me? I have just seen myself begging at my own door, — a warning from heaven! Before long we shall have nothing left but our eyes to weep with. Never while I live shall you do it; do you hear me, César? Underneath all this there is some plot which you don't perceive; you are too upright and loyal to suspect the trickery of others. Why should they come and offer you millions? You are giving up your property, you are going beyond your means; and if your oil does n't succeed, if you don't make the money, if the value of the land can't be realized, how will you pay your notes? With the shells of your nuts? To rise in society you are going to hide your name, take down your sign, 'The Queen of Roses,' and yet you mean to salaam and bow and scrape in advertisements and prospectuses, which will placard César Birotteau at every corner, and on all the boards, wherever they are building."

"Oh! you are not up to it all. I shall have a branch establishment, under the name of Popinot, in

some house near the Rue des Lombards, where I shall put little Anselme. I shall pay my debt of gratitude to Monsieur and Madame Ragon by setting up their nephew, who can make his fortune. The poor Ragonines look to me half-starved of late."

"Bah! all those people want your money."

"But what people, my treasure? Is it your uncle Pillerault, who loves us like the apple of his eye, and dines with us every Sunday? Is it good old Ragon, our predecessor, who has forty upright years in business to boast of, and with whom we play our game of boston? Is it Roguin, a notary, a man fifty-seven years old, twenty-five of which he has been in office? A notary of Paris! he would be the flower of the lot, if honest folk were not all worth the same price. If necessary, my associates will help me. Where is the plot, my white doe? Look here, I must tell you your defect. On the word of an honest man it lies on my heart. You are as suspicious as a cat. As soon as we had two sous worth in the shop you thought the customers were all thieves. I had to go down on my knees to you to let me make you rich. For a Parisian girl you have no ambition! If it had n't been for your perpetual fears, no man could have been happier than I. If I had listened to you I should never have invented the Paste of Sultans nor the Carminative Balm. Our shop has given us a living, but those two discoveries have made the hundred and sixty thousand francs which we possess, net and clear! Without my genius, for I certainly have talent as a perfumer, we should now be petty retail shopkeepers, pulling the devil's tail to make both ends meet. I should n't be a distinguished mer-

chant, competing in the election of judges for the department of commerce; I should be neither a judge nor a deputy-mayor. Do you know what I should be? A shopkeeper like Père Ragon, — be it said without offence, for I respect shopkeeping; the best of our kidney are in it. After selling perfumery like him for forty years, we should be worth three thousand francs a year; and at the price things are now, for they have doubled in value, we should, like them, have barely enough to live on. (Day after day that poor old household wrings my heart more and more. I must know more about it, and I'll get at the truth from Popinot to-morrow!) If I had followed your advice — you who have such uneasy happiness and are always asking whether you will have to-morrow what you have got to-day — I should have no credit, I should have no cross of the Legion of honor. I should not be on the highroad to becoming a political personage. Yes, you may shake your head, but if our affair succeeds I may become deputy of Paris. Ah! I am not named César for nothing; I succeed. It is unimaginable! outside every one credits me with capacity, but here the only person whom I want so much to please that I sweat blood and water to make her happy, is precisely the one who takes me for a fool."

These phrases, divided by eloquent pauses and delivered like shot, after the manner of those who recriminate, expressed so deep and constant an attachment that Madame Birotteau was inwardly touched, though, like all women, she made use of the love she inspired to gain her end.

"Well! Birotteau," she said, "if you love me, let me be happy my own way. Neither you nor I have

education; we don't know how to talk, nor to play 'your obedient servant' like men of the world; how then do you expect that we could succeed in government places? I shall be happy at Les Trésorières, indeed I shall. I have always loved birds and animals, and I can pass my life very well taking care of the hens and the farm. Let us sell the business, marry Césarine, and give up your visions. We can come and pass the winters in Paris with our son-in-law; we shall be happy; nothing in politics or commerce can then change our way of life. Why do you want to crush others? Is n't our present fortune enough for us? When you are a millionnaire can you eat two dinners; will you want two wives? Look at my uncle Pillerault! He is wisely content with his little property, and spends his life in good deeds. Does he want fine furniture? Not he! I know very well you have been ordering furniture for me: I saw Braschon here, and it was not to buy perfumery."

"Well, my beauty, yes! Your furniture is ordered; our improvements begin to-morrow, and are superintended by an architect recommended to me by Monsieur de la Billardière."

"My God!" she cried, "have pity upon us!"

"But you are not reasonable, my love. Do you think that at thirty-seven years of age, fresh and pretty as you are, you can go and bury yourself at Chinon? I, thank God, am only thirty-nine. Chance opens to me a fine career; I enter upon it. If I conduct myself prudently I can make an honorable house among the bourgeoisie of Paris, as was done in former times. I can found the house of Birotteau, like the house of

Keller, or Jules Desmarets, or Roguin, Cochin, Guillaume, Lebas, Nucingen, Saillard, Popinot, Matifat, who make their mark, or have made it, in their respective quarters. Come now! If this affair were not as sure as bars of gold —"

"Sure!"

"Yes, sure. For two months I have figured at it. Without seeming to do so, I have been getting information on building from the department of public works, from architects and contractors. Monsieur Grindot, the young architect who is to alter our house, is in despair that he has no money to put into the speculation."

"He hopes for the work; he says that to screw something out of you."

"Can he take in such men as Pillerault, as Charles Claparon, as Roguin? The profit is as sure as that of the Paste of Sultans."

"But, my dear friend, why should Roguin speculate? He gets his commissions, and his fortune is made. I see him pass sometimes more full of care than a minister of state, with an underhand look which I don't like; he hides some secret anxiety. His face has grown in five years to look like that of an old rake. Who can be sure that he won't kick over the traces when he gets all your property into his own hands. Such things happen. Do we know him well? He has only been a friend for fifteen years, and I would n't put my hand into the fire for him. Why! he is not decent: he does not live with his wife. He must have mistresses who ruin him; I don't see any other cause for his anxiety. When I am dressing I look through the blinds, and I often see him coming home in the mornings: where

from? Nobody knows. He seems to me like a man who has an establishment in town, who spends on his pleasures, and Madame on hers. Is that the life of a notary? If they make fifty thousand francs a year and spend sixty thousand, in twenty years they will get to the end of their property and be as naked as the little Saint John; and then, as they can't do without luxury, they will prey upon their friends without compunction. Charity begins at home. He is intimate with that little scamp du Tillet, our former clerk; and I see nothing good in that friendship. If he does n't know how to judge du Tillet he must be blind; and if he does know him, why does he pet him? You 'll tell me, because his wife is fond of du Tillet. Well, I don't look for any good in a man who has no honor with respect to his wife. Besides, the present owners of that land must be fools to sell for a hundred sous what is worth a hundred francs. If you met a child who did not know the value of a louis, would n't you feel bound to tell him of it? Your affair looks to me like a theft, be it said without offence."

"Good God! how queer women are sometimes, and how they mix up ideas! If Roguin were not in this business, you would say to me: 'Look here, César, you are going into a thing without Roguin; therefore it is worth nothing.' But to-day he is in it, as security, and you tell me —"

"No, that is a Monsieur Claparon."

"But a notary cannot put his own name into a speculation."

"Then why is he doing a thing forbidden by law? How do you answer that, you who are guided by law?"

"Let me go on. Roguin is in it, and you tell me the business is worthless. Is that reasonable? You say, 'He is acting against the law.' But he would put himself openly in the business if it were necessary. Can't they say the same of me? Would Ragon and Pillerault come and say to me: 'Why do you have to do with this affair, — you who have made your money as a merchant?'"

"Merchants are not in the same position as notaries," said Madame Birotteau.

"Well, my conscience is clear," said César, continuing; "the people who sell, sell because they must; we do not steal from them any more than you steal from others when you buy their stocks at seventy-five. We buy the ground to-day at to-day's price. In two years it will be another thing: just so with stocks. Know then, Constance-Barbe-Josephine Pillerault, that you will never catch César Birotteau doing anything against the most rigid honor, nor against the laws, nor against his conscience, nor against delicacy. A man established and known for eighteen years, to be suspected in his own household of dishonesty!"

"Come, be calm, César! A woman who has lived with you all that time knows down to the bottom of your soul. You are the master, after all. You earned your fortune, didn't you? It is yours, and you can spend it. If we are reduced to the last straits of poverty, neither your daughter nor I will make you a single reproach. But, listen: when you invented your Paste of Sultans and Carminative Balm, what did you risk? Five or six thousand francs. To-day you put all your fortune on a game of cards. And you are not the only

one to play; you have associates who may be much cleverer than you. Give your ball, remodel the house, spend ten thousand francs if you like,—it is useless but not ruinous. As to your speculations near the Madeleine, I formally object. You are a perfumer: be a perfumer, and not a speculator in land. We women have instincts which do not deceive us. I have warned you; now follow your own lead. You have been judge in the department of commerce, you know the laws. So far, you have guided the ship well, César; I shall follow you! But I shall tremble till I see our fortune solidly secure and Césarine well married. God grant that my dream be not a prophecy!"

This submission thwarted Birotteau, who now employed an innocent ruse to which he had had recourse on similar occasions.

"Listen, Constance. I have not given my word; though it is the same as if I had."

"Oh, César, all is said; let us say no more. Honor before fortune. Come, go to bed, dear friend, there is no more wood. Besides, we shall talk better in bed, if it amuses you. Oh! that horrid dream! My God! to see one's self! It was fearful! Césarine and I will have to make a pretty number of *neuvaines* for the success of your speculations."

"Doubtless the help of God can do no harm," said Birotteau, gravely. "But the oil of nuts is also powerful, wife. I made this discovery just as I made that of the Double Paste of Sultans,—by chance. The first time by opening a book; this time by looking at an engraving of Hero and Leander: you know, the woman who pours oil on the head of her lover; pretty,

is n't it? The safest speculations are those which depend on vanity, on self-love, on the desire of appearing well. Those sentiments never die."

"Alas! I know it well."

"At a certain age men will turn their souls inside out to get hair, if they have n't any. For some time past hair-dressers have told me that they sell not only Macassar, but all the drugs which are said to dye hair or make it grow. Since the peace, men are more with women, and women don't like bald-heads; hey! hey! Mimi? The demand for that article grows out of the political situation. A composition which will keep the hair in good health will sell like bread; all the more if it has the sanction, as it will have, of the Academy of Sciences. My good Monsieur Vauquelin will perhaps help me once more. I shall go to him to-morrow and submit my idea; offering him at the same time that engraving which I have at last found in Germany, after two years' search. He is now engaged in analyzing hair: Chiffreville, his associate in the manufacture of chemical products, told me so. If my discovery should jump with his, my essence will be bought by both sexes. The idea is a fortune; I repeat it. Mon Dieu! I can't sleep. Hey! luckily little Popinot has the finest head of hair in the world. A shop-girl with hair long enough to touch the ground, and who could say — if the thing were possible without offence to God or my neighbor — that the Oil Comagène (for it shall be an oil, decidedly) has had something to do with it, — all the gray-heads in Paris will fling themselves upon the invention like poverty upon the world. Hey! hey! Mignonne! how about the ball? I am not wicked, but

I should like to meet that little scamp du Tillet, who swells out with his fortune and avoids me at the Bourse. He knows that I know a thing about him which was not fine. Perhaps I have been too kind to him. Is n't it odd, wife, that we are always punished for our good deeds? — here below, I mean. I behaved like a father to him; you don't know all I did for him."

"You give me goose-flesh merely speaking of it. If you knew what he wished to make of you, you would never have kept the secret of his stealing that three thousand francs, — for I guessed just how the thing was done. If you had sent him to the correctional police, perhaps you would have done a service to a good many people."

"What did he wish to make of me?"

"Nothing. If you were inclined to listen to me to-night, I would give you a piece of good advice, Birotteau; and that is, to let your du Tillet alone."

"Won't it seem strange if I exclude him from my house, — a clerk for whom I indorsed to the amount of twenty thousand francs when he first went into business? Come, let us do good for good's sake. Besides, perhaps du Tillet has mended his ways."

"Everything is to be turned topsy-turvy, then?"

"What do you mean with your topsy-turvy? Everything will be ruled like a sheet of music-paper. Have you forgotten what I have just told you about turning the staircase and hiring the first floor of the next house? — which is all settled with the umbrella-maker, Cayron. He and I are going to-morrow to see his proprietor, Monsieur Molineux. To-morrow I have as much to do as a minister of state."

"You turn my brain with your projects," said Constance. "I am all mixed up. Besides, Birotteau, I'm asleep."

"Good-day," replied the husband. "Just listen; I say good-day because it is morning, Mimi. Ah! there she is off, the dear child. Yes! you shall be rich, *richissime*, or I'll renounce my name of César!"

A few moments later Constance and César were peacefully snoring.

II.

A GLANCE rapidly thrown over the past life of this household will strengthen the ideas which ought to have been suggested by the friendly altercation of the two personages in this scene. While picturing the manners and customs of retail shopkeepers, this sketch will also show by what singular chances César Birotteau became deputy-mayor and perfumer, retired officer of the National Guard, and chevalier of the Legion of honor. In bringing to light the depths of his character and the causes of his rise, we shall show that fortuitous commercial events which strong brains dominate, may become irreparable catastrophes for weak ones. Events are never absolute; their results depend on individuals. Misfortune is a stepping-stone for genius, the baptismal font of Christians, a treasure for the skilful man, an abyss for the feeble.

A vine-dresser in the neighborhood of Chinon, named Jean Birotteau, married the waiting-maid of a lady whose vines he tilled. He had three sons; his wife died in giving birth to the last, and the poor man did not long survive her. The mistress had been fond of the maid, and brought up with her own sons the eldest child, François, and placed him in a seminary. Ordained priest, François Birotteau hid himself during the Revolution, and led the wandering life of priests not sworn by the Republic, hunted like wild beasts and

guillotined at the first chance. At the time when this history begins he was vicar of the cathedral of Tours, and had only once left that city to visit his brother César. The bustle of Paris so bewildered the good priest that he was afraid to leave his room. He called the cabriolets "half-coaches," and wondered at all he saw. After a week's stay he went back to Tours resolving never to revisit the capital.

The second son of the vine-dresser, Jean Birotteau, was drafted into the militia, and won the rank of captain early in the wars of the Revolution. At the battle of Trébia, Macdonald called for volunteers to carry a battery. Captain Jean Birotteau advanced with his company, and was killed. The destiny of the Birotteaus demanded, no doubt, that they should be oppressed by men, or by circumstances, wheresoever they planted themselves.

The last child is the hero of this story. When César at fourteen years of age could read, write, and cipher, he left his native place and came to Paris on foot to seek his fortune, with one louis in his pocket. The recommendation of an apothecary at Tours got him a place as shop-boy with Monsieur and Madame Ragon, perfumers. César owned at this period a pair of hob-nailed shoes, a pair of breeches, blue stockings, a flowered waistcoat, a peasant's jacket, three coarse shirts of good linen, and his travelling cudgel. If his hair was cut like that of a choir-boy, he at least had the sturdy loins of a Tourangian; if he yielded sometimes to the native idleness of his birthplace, it was counterbalanced by his desire to make his fortune; if he lacked cleverness and education, he possessed an

instinctive rectitude and delicate feelings, which he inherited from his mother, — a being who had, in Tourangian phrase, a "heart of gold." César received from the Ragons his food, six francs a month as wages, and a pallet to sleep upon in the garret near the cook. The clerks who taught him to pack the goods, to do the errands, and sweep up the shop and the pavement, made fun of him as they did so, according to the manners and customs of shop-keeping, in which chaff is a principal element of instruction. Monsieur and Madame Ragon spoke to him like a dog. No one paid attention to his weariness, though many a night his feet, blistered by the pavements of Paris, and his bruised shoulders, made him suffer horribly. This harsh application of the maxim "each for himself," — the gospel of large cities, — made César think the life of Paris very hard. At night he cried as he thought of Touraine, where the peasant works at his ease, where the mason lays a stone between breakfast and dinner, and idleness is wisely mingled with labor; but he always fell asleep without having time to think of running away, for he had his errands to do in the morning, and obeyed his duty with the instinct of a watch-dog. If occasionally he complained, the head clerk would smile with a jovial air, and say, —

"Ah, my boy! all is not rose at 'The Queen of Roses.' Larks don't fall down roasted; you must run after them and catch them, and then you must find some way to cook them."

The cook, a big creature from Picardy, took the best bits for herself, and only spoke to César when she wanted to complain of Monsieur and Madame Ragon,

who left her nothing to steal. Towards the end of the first month this girl, who was forced to keep house of a Sunday, opened a conversation with César. Ursula with the grease washed off seemed charming to the poor shop-boy, who, unless hindered by chance, was likely to strike on the first rock that lay hidden in his way. Like all unprotected boys, he loved the first woman who threw him a kind look. The cook took César under her protection; and thence followed certain secret relations, which the clerks laughed at pitilessly. Two years later, the cook happily abandoned César for a young recruit belonging to her native place who was then hiding in Paris, — a lad twenty years old, owning a few acres of land, who let Ursula marry him.

During those two years the cook had fed her little César well, and had explained to him certain mysteries of Parisian life, which she made him look at from the bottom; and she impressed upon him, out of jealousy, a profound horror of evil places, whose dangers seemed not unknown to her. In 1792 the feet of the deserted César were well-toughened to the pavements, his shoulders to the bales, and his mind to what he called the "humbugs" of Paris. So when Ursula abandoned him he was speedily consoled, for she had realized none of his instinctive ideas in relation to sentiment. Licentious and surly, wheedling and pilfering, selfish and a tippler, she clashed with the simple nature of Birotteau without offering him any compensating perspective. Sometimes the poor lad felt with pain that he was bound by ties that are strong to hold ingenuous hearts to a creature with whom he could not sympathize. By the time that he became master of his own heart he had reached

his growth, and was sixteen years old. His mind, developed by Ursula and by the banter of the clerks, made him study commerce with an eye in which intelligence was veiled beneath simplicity: he observed the customers; asked in leisure moments for explanations about the merchandise, whose divers sorts and proper places he retained in his head. The day came when he knew all the articles, and their prices and marks, better than any new-comer; and from that time Monsieur and Madame Ragon made a practice of employing him in the business.

When the terrible levy of the year II. made a clean sweep in the shop of citizen Ragon, César Birotteau, promoted to be second clerk, profited by the occasion to obtain a salary of fifty francs a month, and took his seat at the dinner-table of the Ragons with ineffable delight. The second clerk of "The Queen of Roses," possessing already six hundred francs, now had a chamber where he could put away, in long-coveted articles of furniture, the clothing he had little by little got together. Dressed like other young men of an epoch when fashion required the assumption of boorish manners, the gentle and modest peasant had an air and manner which rendered him at least their equal; and he thus passed the barriers which in other times ordinary life would have placed between himself and the bourgeoisie. Towards the end of this year his integrity won him a place in the counting-room. The dignified citoyenne Ragon herself looked after his linen, and the two shopkeepers became familiar with him.

In Vendémiaire, 1794, César, who possessed a hundred louis d'or, changed them for six thousand francs

in assignats, with which he bought into the Funds at thirty, paying for the investment on the very day before the paper began its course of depreciation at the Bourse, and locking up his securities with unspeakable satisfaction. From that day forward he watched the movement of stocks and public affairs with secret anxieties of his own, which made him quiver at each rumor of the reverses or successes that marked this period of our history. Monsieur Ragon, formerly perfumer to her majesty Queen Marie-Antoinette, confided to César Birotteau, during this critical period, his attachment to the fallen tyrants. This disclosure was one of the cardinal events in César's life. The nightly conversations when the shop was closed, the street quiet, the accounts regulated, made a fanatic of the Tourangian, who in becoming a royalist obeyed an inborn instinct. The recital of the virtuous deeds of Louis XVI., the anecdotes with which husband and wife exalted the memory of the queen, fired the imagination of the young man. The horrible fate of those two crowned heads, decapitated a few steps from the shop-door, roused his feeling heart and made him hate a system of government which was capable of shedding blood without repugnance. His commercial interests showed him the death of trade in the Maximum, and in political convulsions, which are always destructive of business. Moreover, like a true perfumer, he hated the revolution which made a Titus of every man and abolished powder. The tranquillity resulting from absolutism could alone, he thought, give life to money, and he grew bigoted on behalf of royalty. When Monsieur Ragon saw that César was well disposed on this point, he made him head-

clerk and initiated him into the secrets of "The Queen of Roses," several of whose customers were the most active and devoted emissaries of the Bourbons, and where the correspondence between Paris and the West secretly went on. Carried away by the fervor of youth, electrified by his intercourse with the Georges, the Billardière, Montauran, Bauvan, Longuy, Manda, Bernier, du Guénic, and the Fontaines, César flung himself into the conspiracy by which the royalists and the terrorists combined on the 13th Vendémiaire against the expiring Convention.

On that day César had the honor of fighting against Napoleon on the steps of Saint-Roch, and was wounded at the beginning of the affair. Every one knows the result of that attempt. If the aide-de-camp of Barras then issued from his obscurity, the obscurity of Birotteau saved the clerk's life. A few friends carried the belligerent perfumer to "The Queen of Roses," where he remained hidden in the garret, nursed by Madame Ragon, and happily forgotten. César Birotteau never had but that one spirt of martial courage. During the month his convalescence lasted, he made solid reflections on the absurdity of an alliance between politics and perfumery. Although he remained royalist, he resolved to be, purely and simply, a royalist perfumer, and never more to compromise himself, body and soul, for his country.

On the 18th Brumaire, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, despairing of the royal cause, determined to give up perfumery, and live like honest bourgeois without meddling in politics. To recover the value of their business, it was necessary to find a man who had more integrity than ambition, more plain good sense than ability.

Ragon proposed the affair to his head-clerk. Birotteau, now master at twenty years of age of a thousand francs a year from the public Funds, hesitated. His ambition was to live near Chinon as soon as he could get together an income of fifteen hundred francs, or whenever the First Consul should have consolidated the public debt by consolidating himself in the Tuileries. Why should he risk his honest and simple independence in commercial uncertainties? he asked himself. He had never expected to win so large a fortune, and he owed it to happy chances which only came in early youth; he intended to marry in Touraine some woman rich enough to enable him to buy and cultivate Les Trésorières, a little property which, from the dawn of his reason, he had coveted, which he dreamed of augmenting, where he could make a thousand crowns a year, and where he would lead a life of happy obscurity. He was about to refuse the offer, when love suddenly changed all his resolutions by increasing tenfold the measure of his ambition.

After Ursula's desertion, César had remained virtuous, as much through fear of the dangers of Paris as from application to his work. When the passions are without food they change their wants; marriage then becomes, to persons of the middle class, a fixed idea, for it is their only way of winning and appropriating a woman. César Birotteau had reached that point. Everything at "The Queen of Roses" now rested on the head-clerk; he had not a moment to give to pleasure. In such a life wants become imperious, and a chance meeting with a beautiful young woman, of whom a libertine clerk would scarcely have dreamed, produced on

César an overpowering effect. On a fine June day, crossing by the Pont-Marie to the Île Saint-Louis, he saw a young girl standing at the door of a shop at the angle of the Quai d'Anjou. Constance Pillerault was the forewoman of a linen-draper's establishment called Le Petit Matelot,— the first of those shops which have since been established in Paris with more or less of painted signs, floating banners, show-cases filled with swinging shawls, cravats arranged like houses of cards, and a thousand other commercial seductions, such as fixed prices, fillets of suspended objects, placards, illusions and optical effects carried to such a degree of perfection that a shop-front has now become a commercial poem. The low price of all the articles called "Novelties" which were to be found at the Petit-Matelot gave the shop an unheard of vogue, and that in a part of Paris which was the least favorable to fashion and commerce. The young forewoman was at this time cited for her beauty, as was the case in later days with the beautiful lemonade-girl of the café of the Milles Colonnes, and several other poor creatures who flattened more noses, young and old, against the window-panes of milliners, confectioners, and linen-drapers, than there are stones in the streets of Paris.

The head-clerk of "The Queen of Roses," living between Saint-Roch and the Rue de la Sourdière, knew nothing of the existence of the Petit-Matelot; for the smaller trades of Paris are more or less strangers to each other. César was so vigorously smitten by the beauty of Constance that he rushed furiously into the shop to buy six linen shirts, disputing the price a long time, and requiring volumes of linen to be unfolded

and shown to him, precisely like an Englishwoman in the humor for "shopping." The young person deigned to take notice of César, perceiving, by certain symptoms known to women, that he came more for the seller than the goods. He dictated his name and address to the young lady, who grew very indifferent to the admiration of her customer so soon as the purchase was made. The poor clerk had had little to do to win the good graces of Ursula; in such matters he was as silly as a sheep, and love now made him sillier. He dared not utter a word, and was moreover too dazzled to observe the indifference which succeeded the smiles of the syren shopwoman.

For eight succeeding days César mounted guard every evening before the Petit-Matelot, watching for a look as a dog waits for a bone at the kitchen door, indifferent to the derision of the clerks and the shop-girls, humbly stepping aside for the buyers and passers-by, and absorbed in the little revolving world of the shop. Some days later he again entered the paradise of his angel, less to purchase handkerchiefs than to communicate to her a luminous idea.

"If you should have need of perfumery, Mademoiselle, I could furnish you in the same manner," he said as he paid for the handkerchiefs.

Constance Pillerault was daily receiving brilliant proposals, in which there was no question of marriage; and though her heart was as pure as her forehead was white, it was only after six months of marches and countermarches, in the course of which César revealed his inextinguishable love, that she condescended to receive his attentions, and even then without committing herself to

an answer, — a prudence suggested by the number of her swains, wholesale wine-merchants, rich proprietors of cafés, and others who made soft eyes at her. The lover was backed up in his suit by the guardian of Constance, Monsieur Claude-Joseph Pillerault, at that time an ironmonger on the Quai de la Ferraille, whom the young man had finally discovered by devoting himself to the subterraneous spying which distinguishes a genuine love.

The rapidity of this narrative compels us to pass over in silence the joys of Parisian love tasted with innocence, the prodigalities peculiar to clerkdom, such as melons in their earliest prime, choice dinners at Vénua's followed by the theatre, Sunday jaunts to the country in hackney-coaches. Without being handsome, there was nothing in César's person which made it difficult to love him. The life of Paris and his sojourn in a dark shop had dulled the brightness of his peasant complexion. His abundant black hair, his solid neck and shoulders like those of a Norman horse, his sturdy limbs, his honest and straightforward manner, all contributed to predispose others in his favor. The uncle Pillerault, whose duty it was to watch over the happiness of his brother's daughter, made inquiries which resulted in his sanctioning the wishes of the young Tourangian. In the year 1800, and in the pretty month of May, Mademoiselle Pillerault consented to marry César Birotteau, who fainted with joy at the moment when, under a linden at Sceaux, Constance-Barbe-Josephine Pillerault accepted him as her husband.

"My little girl," said Monsieur Pillerault, "you have won a good husband. He has a warm heart and

honorable feelings; he is true as gold, and as good as an infant Jesus, — in fact, a king of men."

Constance frankly abdicated the more brilliant destiny to which, like all shop-girls, she may at times have aspired. She wished to be an honest woman, a good mother of a family, and looked at life according to the religious programme of the middle classes. Such a career suited her own ideas far better than the dangerous vanities which seduce so many youthful Parisian imaginations. Constance, with her narrow intelligence, was a type of the petty bourgeoisie whose labors are not performed without grumbling; who begin by refusing what they desire, and end by getting angry when taken at their word; whose restless activity is carried into the kitchen and into the counting-room, into the gravest matters of business, and into the invisible darns of the household linen; who love while scolding, who conceive no ideas but the simplest (the small change of the mind); who argue about everything, fear everything, calculate everything, and fret perpetually over the future. Her cold but ingenuous beauty, her touching expression, her freshness and purity, prevented Birotteau from thinking of defects, which moreover were more than compensated by a delicate sense of honor natural to women, by an excessive love of order, by a fanaticism for work, and by her genius as a saleswoman. Constance was eighteen years old, and possessed eleven thousand francs of her own. César, inspired by his love with an excessive ambition, bought the business of "The Queen of Roses" and removed it to a handsome building near the Place Vendôme. At the early age of twenty-one, married to a woman he

adored, the proprietor of an establishment for which he had paid three quarters of the price down, he had the right to view, and did view, the future in glowing colors; all the more when he measured the path which led from his original point of departure. Roguin, notary of Ragon, who had drawn up the marriage contract, gave the new perfumer some sound advice, and prevented him from paying the whole purchase money down with the fortune of his wife.

"Keep the means of undertaking some good enterprise, my lad," he had said to him.

Birotteau looked up to the notary with admiration, fell into the habit of consulting him, and made him his friend. Like Ragon and Pillerault, he had so much faith in the profession that he gave himself up to Roguin without allowing himself a suspicion. Thanks to this advice, César, supplied with the eleven thousand francs of his wife for his start in business, would have scorned to exchange his possessions for those of the First Consul, brilliant as the prospects of Napoleon might seem. At first the Birotteaus kept only a cook, and lived in the *entresol* above the shop, — a sort of den tolerably well decorated by an upholsterer, where the bride and bridegroom began a honeymoon that was never to end. Madame César appeared to advantage behind the counter. Her celebrated beauty had an enormous influence upon the sales, and the beautiful Madame Birotteau became a topic among the fashionable young men of the Empire. If César was sometimes accused of royalism, the world did justice to his honesty; if a few neighboring shopkeepers envied his happiness, every one at least thought him worthy of it. The bullet which struck

him on the steps of Saint-Roch gave him the reputation of being mixed up with political secrets, and also of being a courageous man, — though he had no military courage in his heart, and not the smallest political idea in his brain. Upon these grounds the worthy people of the arrondissement made him captain of the National Guard; but he was cashiered by Napoleon, who, according to Birotteau, owed him a grudge for their encounter on the 13th Vendémiaire. César thus obtained at a cheap rate a varnish of persecution, which made him interesting in the eyes of the opposition, and gave him a certain importance.

Such was the history of this household, lastingly happy through its feelings, and agitated only by commercial anxieties.

During the first year César instructed his wife about the sales of their merchandise and the details of perfumery, — a business which she understood admirably. She really seemed to have been created and sent into the world to fit on the gloves of customers. At the close of that year the assets staggered our ambitious perfumer; all costs calculated, he would be able in less than twenty years to make a modest capital of one hundred thousand francs, which was the sum at which he estimated their happiness. He then resolved to reach fortune more rapidly, and determined to manufacture articles as well as retail them. Contrary to the advice of his wife, he hired some sheds, with the ground about them, in the Faubourg du Temple, and painted upon them in big letters, "Manufactory of César Birotteau." He enticed a skilful workman from Grasse, with whom

he began, on equal shares, the manufacture of soaps, essences, and eau-de-cologne. His connection with this man lasted only six months, and ended by losses which fell upon him alone. Without allowing himself to be discouraged, Birotteau determined to get better results at any price, solely to avoid being scolded by his wife, — to whom he acknowledged later that in those depressing days his head had boiled like a saucepan, and that several times, if it had not been for his religious sentiments, he should have flung himself into the Seine.

Harassed by some unprofitable enterprise, he was lounging one day along the boulevard on his way to dinner, — for the Parisian lounger is as often a man filled with despair as an idler, — when among a parcel of books for six sous a-piece, laid out in a hamper on the pavement, his eyes lighted on the following title, yellow with dust: "Abdeker, or the Art of Preserving Beauty." He picked up the so-called Arab book, a sort of romance written by a physician of the preceding century, and happened on a page which related to perfumes. Leaning against a tree on the boulevard to turn over the leaves at his ease, he read a note by the author which explained the nature of the skin and the cuticle, and showed that a certain soap, or a certain paste, often produced effects quite contrary to those expected of them, if the soap and the paste toned up a skin which needed relaxing, or relaxed a skin which required tonics. Birotteau bought the book, in which he saw his fortune. Nevertheless, having little confidence in his own lights, he consulted a celebrated chemist, Vauquelin, from whom he naïvely inquired how to mix a

two-sided cosmetic which should produce effects appropriate to the diversified nature of the human epidermis. Truly scientific men — men who are really great in the sense that they never attain in their lifetime the renown which their immense and unrecognized labors deserve — are nearly always kind, and willing to serve the poor in spirit. Vauquelin accordingly patronized the perfumer, and allowed him to call himself the inventor of a paste to whiten the hands, the composition of which he dictated to him. Birotteau named this cosmetic the "Double Paste of Sultans." To complete the work, he applied the same recipe to the manufacture of a lotion for the complexion, which he called the "Carminative Balm." He imitated in his own line the system of the Petit-Matelot, and was the first perfumer to display that redundancy of placards, advertisements, and other methods of publication which are called, perhaps unjustly, charlatanism.

The Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm were ushered into the world of fashion and commerce by colored placards, at the head of which were these words, "Approved by the Institute." This formula, used for the first time, had a magical effect. Not only all France, but the continent flaunted with the posters, yellow, red, and blue, of the monarch of "The Queen of Roses," who kept in stock, supplied, and manufactured, at moderate prices, all that belonged to his trade. At a period when nothing was talked of but the East, to name any sort of cosmetic the "Paste of Sultans," thus divining the magic force of such words in a land where every man hoped to be a sultan as much as every woman longed to be a sultana, was an inspiration which

could only have come to a common man or a man of genius. The public always judges by results. Birotteau passed for a superior man, commercially speaking; all the more because he compiled a prospectus whose ridiculous phraseology was an element of success. In France they only make fun of things which occupy the public mind, and the public does not occupy itself with things that do not succeed. Though Birotteau perpetrated this folly in good faith and not as a trick, the world gave him credit for knowing how to play the fool for a purpose. We have found, not without difficulty, a copy of this prospectus at the establishment of Popinot & Co., druggists, Rue des Lombards. This curious document belongs to the class which, in a higher sphere, historians call *pièces justificatives.* We give it here:

THE DOUBLE PASTE OF SULTANS

AND CARMINATIVE BALM

OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

MARVELLOUS DISCOVERY!

Approved by the Institute of France.

"For many years a paste for the hands and a lotion for the face offering superior results to those obtained from Eau-de-Cologne in the domain of the toilet, has been widely sought by both sexes in Europe. Devoting long vigils to the study of the skin and cuticle of the two sexes, each of whom, one as much as the other, attach the utmost importance to the softness, suppleness, brilliancy, and velvet texture of the complexion, the Sieur Birotteau, perfumer, favorably known in this metropolis and abroad, has discovered a Paste and a Lotion justly hailed as marvellous

by the fashion and elegance of Paris. In point of fact, this Paste and this Lotion possess amazing properties which act upon the skin without prematurely wrinkling it, — the inevitable result of drugs thoughtlessly employed, and sold in these days by ignorance and cupidity. This discovery rests upon diversities of temperament, which divide themselves into two great classes, indicated by the color of the Paste and the Lotion, which will be found *pink* for the skin and cuticle of persons of lymphatic habit, and *white* for those possessed of a sanguine temperament.

"This Paste is named the 'Paste of Sultans,' because the discovery was originally made for the Seraglio by an Arabian physician. It has been approved by the Institute on the recommendation of our illustrious chemist, Vauquelin; together with the Lotion, fabricated on the same principles which govern the composition of the Paste.

"This precious Paste, exhaling as it does the sweetest perfumes, removes all blotches, even those that are obstinately rebellious, whitens the most recalcitrant epidermis, and dissipates the perspirations of the hand, of which both sexes equally complain.

"The Carminative Balm will disperse the little pimples which appear inopportunely at certain times, and interfere with a lady's projects for a ball; it refreshes and revives the color by opening or shutting the pores of the skin according to the exigencies of the individual temperament. It is so well known already for its effect in arresting the ravages of time that many, out of gratitude, have called it the 'Friend of Beauty.'

"Eau-de-Cologne is, purely and simply, a trivial perfume without special efficacy of any kind; while the Double Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm are two operative compounds, of a motive power which acts without risk upon the internal energies and seconds them. Their perfumes (essentially balsamic, and of a stimulating character which admirably revives the heart and brain) awake ideas and vivify

them; they are as wonderful for their simplicity as for their merits. In short, they offer one attraction the more to women, and to men a means of seduction which it is within their power to secure.

"The daily use of the Balm will relieve the smart occasioned by the heat of the razor; it will protect the lips from chapping, and restore their color; it dispels in time all discolorations, and revives the natural tones of the skin. Such results demonstrate in man a perfect equilibrium of the juices of life, which tends to relieve all persons subject to headache from the sufferings of that horrible malady. Finally, the Carminative Balm, which can be employed by women in all stages of their toilet, will prevent cutaneous diseases by facilitating the transpiration of the tissues, and communicating to them a permanent texture like that of velvet.

"Address, post-paid, Monsieur César Birotteau, successor to Ragon, former perfumer to the Queen Marie Antoinette, at The Queen of Roses, Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, near the Place Vendôme.

"The price of a cake of Paste is three francs; that of the bottle six francs.

"Monsieur César Birotteau, to avoid counterfeits, informs the public that the Paste is wrapped in paper bearing his signature, and that the bottles have a stamp blown in the glass."

The success was owing, without César's suspecting it, to Constance, who advised him to send cases of the Carminative Balm and the Paste of Sultans to all perfumers in France and in foreign cities, offering them at the same time a discount of thirty per cent if they would buy the two articles by the gross. The Paste and the Balm were, in reality, worth more than other cosmetics of the sort; and they captivated ignorant

people by the distinctions they set up among the tem peraments. The five hundred perfumers of France allured by the discount, each bought annually from Birotteau more than three hundred gross of the Paste and the Lotion, — a consumption which, if it gave only a limited profit on each article, became enormous considered in bulk. César was then able to buy the huts and the land in the Faubourg du Temple ; he built large manufactories, and decorated his shop at " The Queen of Roses" with much magnificence ; his household began to taste the little joys of competence, and his wife no longer trembled as before.

In 1810 Madame César, foreseeing a rise in rents, pushed her husband into becoming chief tenant of the house where they had hitherto occupied only the shop and the *entresol*, and advised him to remove their own appartement to the first floor. A fortunate event induced Constance to shut her eyes to the follies which Birotteau committed for her sake in fitting up the new appartement. The perfumer had just been elected judge in the commercial courts : his integrity, his well-known sense of honor, and the respect he enjoyed, earned for him this dignity, which ranked him henceforth among the leading merchants of Paris. To improve his knowledge, he rose daily at five o'clock, and read law-reports and books treating of commercial litigation. His sense of justice, his rectitude, his conscientious intentions, — qualities essential to the understanding of questions submitted for consular decision, — soon made him highly esteemed among the judges. His defects contributed not a little to his reputation. Conscious of his inferiority, César subordinated his

own views to those of his colleagues, who were flattered in being thus deferred to. Some sought the silent approbation of a man held to be sagacious, in his capacity of listener; others, charmed with his modesty and gentleness, praised him publicly. Plaintiffs and defendants extolled his kindness, his conciliatory spirit; and he was often chosen umpire in contests where his own good sense would have suggested the swift justice of a Turkish cadi. During his whole period in office he contrived to use language which was a medley of commonplaces mixed with maxims and computations served up in flowing phrases mildly put forth, which sounded to the ears of superficial people like eloquence. Thus he pleased that great majority, mediocre by nature, who are condemned to perpetual labor and to views which are of the earth earthy. César, however, lost so much time in court that his wife obliged him finally to resign the expensive dignity.

Towards 1813, the Birotteau household, thanks to its constant harmony, and after steadily plodding on through life, saw the dawn of an era of prosperity which nothing seemed likely to interrupt. Monsieur and Madame Ragon, their predecessors, the uncle Pillerault, Roguin the notary, the Messrs. Matifat, druggists in the Rue des Lombards and purveyors to "The Queen of Roses," Joseph Lebas, woollen draper and successor to the Messrs. Guillaume at the Maison du Chat-qui-pelote (one of the luminaries of the Rue Saint-Denis), Popinot the judge, brother of Madame Ragon, Chiffreville of the firm of Protez & Chiffreville, Monsieur and Madame Cochin, employed in the treasury department and sleeping partners in the house of

Matifat, the Abbé Loraux, confessor and director of the pious members of this coterie, with a few other persons, made up the circle of their friends. In spite of the royalist sentiments of Birotteau, public opinion was in his favor; he was considered very rich, though in fact he possessed only a hundred thousand francs over and above his business. The regularity of his affairs, his punctuality, his habit of making no debts, of never discounting his paper, and of taking, on the contrary, safe securities from those whom he could thus oblige, together with his general amiability, won him enormous credit. His household cost him nearly twenty thousand francs a year, and the education of Césarine, an only daughter, idolized by Constance as well as by himself, necessitated heavy expenses. Neither husband nor wife considered money when it was a question of giving pleasure to their child, from whom they had never been willing to separate. Imagine the happiness of the poor parvenu peasant as he listened to his charming Césarine playing a sonata of Steibelt's on the piano, and singing a ballad; or when he found her writing the French language correctly, or reading Racine, father and son, and explaining their beauties, or sketching a landscape, or painting in sepia! What joy to live again in a flower so pure, so lovely, which had never left the maternal stem; an angel whose budding graces and whose earliest developments he had passionately watched; an only daughter, incapable of despising her father, or of ridiculing his defective education, so truly was she an ingenuous young girl.

When he first came to Paris, César had known how to read, write, and cipher, but his education stopped

P. G. Jeanniot

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Procédé Goupil

there; his laborious life had kept him from acquiring ideas and knowledge outside the business of perfumery. Mixing wholly with people to whom science and letters were of no importance, and whose information did not go beyond their specialty, having no time to give to higher studies, the perfumer had become a merely practical man. He adopted necessarily the language, blunders, and opinions of the bourgeois of Paris, who admires Molière, Voltaire, and Rousseau on faith, and buys their books without ever reading them; who maintains that people should say *ormoires*, because women put away their gold and their dresses of moire in those articles of furniture, and that it is only a corruption of the language to say *armoires*. Potier, Talma, and Mademoiselle Mars were ten times millionnaires, and did not live like other human beings; the great tragedian ate raw meat, and Mademoiselle Mars sometimes drank dissolved pearls, in imitation of a celebrated Egyptian actress. The Emperor had leather pockets in his waistcoat, so that he could take his snuff by the handful; he rode on horseback at full gallop up the stairway of the orangery at Versailles. Writers and artists died in the hospital, as a natural consequence of their eccentricities; they were, moreover, all atheists, and people should be very careful not to admit them into their households. Joseph Lebas cited with horror the history of his step-sister Augustine's marriage with the painter Sommervieux. Astronomers lived on spiders.

These striking points of information on the French language, on dramatic art, politics, literature, and science, will explain the bearings of the bourgeois intellect.

A poet passing through the Rue des Lombards may dream of Araby as he inhales certain perfumes. He may admire the *danseuses* in a *chauderie*, as he breathes the odors of an Indian root. Dazzled by the blaze of cochineal, he recalls the poems of the Veda, the religion of Brahma and its castes; brushing against piles of ivory in the rough, he mounts the backs of elephants; seated in a muslin cage, he makes love like the King of Lahore. But the little retail merchant is ignorant from whence have come, or where may grow, the products in which he deals. Birotteau, perfumer, did not know an iota of natural history, nor of chemistry. Though regarding Vauquelin as a great man, he thought him an exception, — of about the same capacity as the retired grocer who summed up a discussion on the method of importing teas, by remarking with a knowing air, "There are but two ways: tea comes either by caravan, or by Havre." According to Birotteau, aloes and opium were only to be found in the Rue des Lombards. Rosewater, said to be brought from Constantinople, was made in Paris like eau-de-cologne. The names of these places were shams, invented to please Frenchmen who could not endure the things of their own country. A French merchant must call his discoveries English to make them fashionable, just as in England the druggists attribute theirs to France.

Nevertheless, César was incapable of being wholly stupid or a fool. Honesty and goodness cast upon all the acts of his life a light which made them creditable; for noble conduct makes even ignorance seem worthy. Success gave him confidence. In Paris confidence is

accepted as power, of which it is the outward sign. As for Madame Birotteau, having measured César during the first three years of their married life, she was a prey to continual terror. She represented in their union the sagacious and fore-casting side, — doubt, opposition, and fear; while César, on the other hand, was the embodiment of audacity, energy, and the inexpressible delights of fatalism. Yet in spite of these appearances the husband often quaked, while the wife, in reality, was possessed of patience and true courage.

Thus it happened that a man who was both mediocre and pusillanimous, without education, without ideas, without knowledge, without force of character, and who might be expected not to succeed in the slipperiest city in the world, came by his principles of conduct, by his sense of justice, by the goodness of a heart that was truly Christian, and through his love for the only woman he had really won, to be considered as a remarkable man, courageous, and full of resolution. The public saw results only. Excepting Pillerault and Popinot the judge, all the people of his own circle knew him superficially, and were unable to judge him. Moreover, the twenty or thirty friends he had collected about him talked the same nonsense, repeated the same commonplaces, and all thought themselves superior in their own line. The women vied with each other in dress and good dinners; each had said her all when she dropped a contemptuous word about her husband. Madame Birotteau alone had the good sense to treat hers with honor and respect in public; she knew him to be a man who, in spite of his secret disabilities, had earned their fortune, and whose good name she shared.

It is true that she sometimes asked herself what sort of world this could be, if all the men who were thought superior were like her husband. Such conduct contributed not a little to maintain the respectful esteem bestowed upon the perfumer in a community where women are much inclined to complain of their husbands and bring them into discredit.

The first days of the year 1814, so fatal to imperial France, were marked at the Birotteaus by two events, not especially remarkable in other households, but of a nature to impress such simple souls as César and his wife, who casting their eyes along the past could find nothing but tender memories. They had taken as head-clerk a youug man twenty-two years of age, named Ferdinand du Tillet. This lad — who had just left a perfumery where he was refused a share in the business, and who was reckoned a genius — had made great efforts to get employed at "The Queen of Roses," whose methods, facilities, and customs were well known to him. Birotteau took him, and gave him a salary of a thousand francs, intending to make him eventually his successor.

Ferdinand had so great an influence on the destinies of this family that it is necessary to say a few words about him. In the first place he was named simply Ferdinand, without surname. This anonymous condition seemed to him an immense advantage at the time when Napoleon conscripted all families to fill the ranks. He was, however, born somewhere, as the result of some cruel and voluptuous caprice. The following are the only facts preserved about his civil condition. In 1793

a poor girl of Tillet, a village near Andelys, came by night and gave birth to a child in the garden of the curate of the church at Tillet, and after rapping on the window-shutters went away and drowned herself. The good priest took the child, gave him the name of the saint inscribed on the calendar for that day, and fed and brought him up as his own son. The curate died in 1804, without leaving enough property to carry on the education he had begun. Ferdinand, thrown upon Paris, led a filibustering life whose chances might bring him to the scaffold, to fortune, the bar, the army, commerce, or domestic life. Obliged to live like a Figaro, he was first a commercial traveller, then a perfumer's clerk in Paris, where he turned up after traversing all France, having studied the world and made up his mind to succeed at any price.

In 1813 Ferdinand thought it necessary to register his age, and obtain a civil standing by applying to the courts at Andelys for a judgment, which should enable his baptismal record to be transferred from the registry of the parish to that of the mayor's office ; and he obtained permission to rectify the document by inserting the name of du Tillet, under which he was known, and which legally belonged to him through the fact of his exposure and abandonment in that township. Without father, mother, or other guardian than the *procureur impérial*, alone in the world and owing no duty to any man, he found society a hard stepmother, and he handled it, in his turn, without gloves, — as the Turks the Moors ; he knew no guide but his own interests, and any means to fortune he considered good. This young Norman, gifted with dangerous abilities, coupled his

desires for success with the harsh defects which, justly or unjustly, are attributed to the natives of his province. A wheedling manner cloaked a quibbling mind, for he was in truth a hard judicial wrangler. But if he boldly contested the rights of others, he certainly yielded none of his own; he attacked his adversary at the right moment, and wearied him out with his inflexible persistency. His merits were those of the Scapins of ancient comedy; he had their fertility of resource, their cleverness in skirting evil, their itching to lay hold of all that was good to keep. In short, he applied to his own poverty a saying which the Abbé Terray uttered in the name of the State,—he kept a loophole to become in after years an honest man. Gifted with passionate energy, with a boldness that was almost military in requiring good as well as evil actions from those about him, and justifying such demands on the theory of personal interest, he despised men too much, believing them all corruptible, he was too unscrupulous in the choice of means, thinking all equally good, he was too thoroughly convinced that the success of money was the absolution of all moral mechanism, not to attain his ends sooner or later.

Such a man, standing between the hulks and a vast fortune, was necessarily vindictive, domineering, quick in decisions, yet as dissimulating as a Cromwell planning to decapitate the head of integrity. His real depth was hidden under a light and jesting mind. Mere clerk as he was, his ambition knew no bounds. With one comprehensive glance of hatred he had taken in the whole of society, saying boldly to himself, "Thou shalt be mine!" He had vowed not to marry till he

was forty, and kept his word. Physically, Ferdinand was a tall, slender young man, with a good figure and adaptive manners, which enabled him to take, on occasion, the key-note of the various societies in which he found himself. His ignoble face was rather pleasant at first sight; but later, on closer acquaintance, expressions were caught such as come to the surface of those who are ill at ease in their own minds, and whose consciences groan at certain times. His complexion, which was sanguine under the soft skin of a Norman, had a crude or acrid color. The glance of his eye, whose iris was circled with a whitish rim as if it were lined with silver, was evasive yet terrible when he fixed it straight upon his victim. His voice had a hollow sound, like that of a man worn out with much speaking. His thin lips were not wanting in charm, but his pointed nose and slightly projecting forehead showed defects of race; and his hair, of a tint like hair that has been dyed black, indicated a mongrel descent, through which he derived his mental qualities from some libertine lord, his low instincts from a seduced peasant-girl, his knowledge from an incomplete education, and his vices from his deserted and abandoned condition.

Birotteau discovered with much amazement that his clerk went out in the evening very elegantly dressed, came home late, and was seen at the balls of bankers and notaries. Such habits displeased César, according to whose ideas clerks should study the books of the firm and think only of their business. The worthy man was shocked by trifles, and reproached du Tillet gently for wearing linen that was too fine, for leaving cards on which his name was inscribed, F. du Tillet, — a fashion,

according to commercial jurisprudence, which belonged only to the great world. Ferdinand had entered the employ of this Orgon with the intentions of a Tartuffe. He paid court to Madame César, tried to seduce her, and judged his master very much as the wife judged him herself, and all with alarming rapidity. Though discreet, reserved, and accustomed to say only what he meant to say, du Tillet unbosomed his opinions on men and life in a way to shock a scrupulous woman who shared the religious feelings of her husband, and who thought it a crime to do the least harm to a neighbor. In spite of Madame Birotteau's caution, du Tillet suspected the contempt in which she held him. Constance, to whom Ferdinand had written a few love-letters, soon noticed a change in his manners, which grew presuming, as if intended to convey the idea of a mutual good understanding. Without giving the secret reason to her husband, she advised him to send Ferdinand away. Birotteau agreed with his wife, and the dismissal was determined upon.

Two days before it was carried into effect, on a Saturday night when Birotteau was making up his monthly accounts, three thousand francs were found to be missing. His consternation was dreadful, less for the loss than for the suspicions which fell upon three clerks, one cook, a shop-boy, and several habitual workmen. On whom should he lay the blame? Madame Birotteau never left her counter. The clerk who had charge of the desk was a nephew of Monsieur Ragon named Popinot, a young man nineteen years old, who lived with the Birotteaus and was integrity itself. His figures, which disagreed with the money in

the desk, revealed the deficit, and showed that the abstraction had been made after the balance had been added up. Husband and wife resolved to keep silence and watch the house. On the following day, Sunday, they received their friends. The families who made up their coterie met at each other's houses for little festivities, turn and turn about. While playing at *bouillote*, Roguin the notary placed on the card-table some old louis d'or which Madame César had taken only a few days before from a bride, Madame d'Espart.

"Have you been robbing the poor-box?" asked the perfumer, laughing.

Roguin replied that he had won the money, at the house of a banker, from du Tillet, who confirmed the answer without blushing. César, on the other hand, grew scarlet. When the evening was over, and just as Ferdinand was going to bed, Birotteau took him into the shop on a pretext of business.

"Du Tillet," said the worthy man, "three thousand francs are missing from the desk. I suspect no one; but the circumstance of the old louis seems too much against you not to oblige me to speak of it. We will not go to bed till we have found where the error lies, — for, after all, it may be only an error. Perhaps you took something on account of your salary?"

Du Tillet said at once that he had taken the louis. The perfumer opened his ledger and found that his clerk's account had not been debited.

"I was in a hurry; but I ought to have made Popinot enter the sum," said Ferdinand.

"That is true," said Birotteau, bewildered by the cool unconcern of the Norman, who well knew the

worthy people among whom he had come meaning to make his fortune. The perfumer and his clerk passed the whole night in examining accounts, a labor which the good man knew to be useless. In coming and going about the desk César slipped three bills of a thousand francs each into the money-drawer, catching them against the top of it; then he pretended to be much fatigued and to fall asleep and snore. Du Tillet awoke him triumphantly, with an excessive show of joy at discovering the error. The next day Birotteau scolded little Popinot and his wife publicly, as if very angry with them for their negligence. Fifteen days later Ferdinand du Tillet got a situation with a stock-broker. He said perfumery did not suit him, and he wished to learn banking. In leaving Birotteau, he spoke of Madame César in a way to make people suppose that his master had dismissed him out of jealousy. A few months later, however, du Tillet went to see Birotteau and asked his indorsement for twenty thousand francs, to enable him to make up the securities he needed in an enterprise which was to put him on the high-road to fortune. Observing the surprise which César showed at this impudence, du Tillet frowned, and asked if he had no confidence in him. Matifat and two other merchants, who were present on business with Birotteau, also observed the indignation of the perfumer, who repressed his anger in their presence. Du Tillet, he thought, might have become an honest man; his previous fault might have been committed for some mistress in distress or from losses at cards; the public reprobation of an honest man might drive one still young, and possibly repentant, into a career of crime. So this

angel took up his pen and indorsed du Tillet's notes, telling him that he was heartily willing thus to oblige a lad who had been very useful to him. The blood rushed to his face as he uttered the falsehood. Du Tillet could not meet his eye, and no doubt vowed to him at that moment the undying hatred which the spirits of darkness feel towards the angels of light.

From this time du Tillet held his balance-pole so well as he danced the tight-rope of financial speculation, that he was rich and elegant in appearance before he became so in reality. As soon as he got a cabriolet he was always in it; he kept himself in the high sphere of those who mingle business with pleasure, and make the foyer of the opera-house a branch of the Bourse, — in short, the Turcarets of the period. Thanks to Madame Roguin, whom he had known at the Birotteau's, he was received at once among people of the highest standing in finance; and, at the moment of which we write, he had reached a prosperity in which there was nothing fictitious. He was on the best terms with the house of Nucingen, to which Roguin had introduced him, and he had promptly become connected with the brothers Keller and with several other great banking-houses. No one knew from whence this youth had derived the immense capital which he handled, but every one attributed his success to his intelligence and his integrity.

The Restoration made César a personage, and the turmoil of political crises naturally lessened his recollection of these domestic misadventures. The constancy of his royalist opinions (to which he had become exceedingly indifferent since his wound, though he re-

mained faithful to them out of decency) and the memory of his devotion in Vendémiaire won him very high patronage, precisely because he had asked for none. He was appointed major in the National Guard, although he was utterly incapable of giving the word of command. In 1815 Napoleon, always his enemy, dismissed him. During the Hundred Days Birotteau was the bugbear of the liberals of his quarter; for it was not until 1815 that differences of political opinion grew up among merchants, who had hitherto been unanimous in their desires for public tranquillity, of which, as they knew, business affairs stood much in need.

At the second Restoration the royal government was obliged to remodel the municipality of Paris. The prefect wished to nominate Birotteau as mayor. Thanks to his wife, the perfumer would only accept the place of deputy-mayor, which brought him less before the public. Such modesty increased the respect generally felt for him, and won him the friendship of the new mayor, Monsieur Flamet de la Billardière. Birotteau, who had seen him in the shop in the days when "The Queen of Roses" was the headquarters of royalist conspiracy, mentioned him to the prefect of the Seine when that official consulted César on the choice to be made. Monsieur and Madame Birotteau were therefore never forgotten in the invitations of the mayor. Madame Birotteau frequently took up the collections at Saint-Roch in the best of good company. La Billardière warmly supported Birotteau when the question of bestowing the crosses given to the municipality came up, and dwelt upon his wound at Saint-Roch, his attachment to the Bourbons, and the respect which he enjoyed. The government, wishing

on the one hand to cheapen Napoleon's order by lavishing the cross of the Legion of honor, and on the other to win adherents and rally to the Bourbons the various trades and men of arts and sciences, included Birotteau in the coming promotion. This honor, which suited well with the show that César made in his arrondissement, put him in a position where the ideas of a man accustomed to succeed naturally enlarged themselves. The news which the mayor had just given him of his preferment was the determining reason that decided him to plunge into the scheme which he now for the first time revealed to his wife; he believed it would enable him to give up perfumery all the more quickly, and rise into the regions of the higher bourgeoisie of Paris.

César was now forty years old. The work he had undertaken in his manufactories had given him a few premature wrinkles, and had slightly silvered the thick tufts of hair on which the pressure of his hat left a shining circle. His forehead, where the hair grew in a way to mark five distinct points, showed the simplicity of his life. The heavy eyebrows were not alarming because the limpid glance of his frank blue eyes harmonized with the open forehead of an honest man. His nose, broken at the bridge and thick at the end, gave him the wondering look of a gaby in the streets of Paris. His lips were very thick, and his large chin fell in a straight line below them. His face, high-colored and square in outline, revealed, by the lines of its wrinkles and by the general character of its expression, the ingenuous craftiness of a peasant. The strength of his body, the stoutness of his limbs, the

squareness of his shoulders, the width of his feet, — all denoted the villager transplanted to Paris. His powerful hairy hands, with their large square nails, would alone have attested his origin if other vestiges had not remained on various parts of his person. His lips wore the cordial smile which shopkeepers put on when a customer enters; but this commercial sunshine was really the image of his inward content, and pictured the state of his kindly soul. His distrust never went beyond the lines of his business, his craftiness left him on the steps of the Bourse, or when he closed the pages of his ledger. Suspicion was to him very much what his printed bill-heads were, — a necessity of the sale itself. His countenance presented a sort of comical assurance and conceit mingled with good nature, which gave it originality and saved it from too close a resemblance to the insipid face of a Parisian bourgeois. Without this air of naïve self-admiration and faith in his own person, he would have won too much respect; he drew nearer to his fellows by thus contributing his quota of absurdity. When speaking, he habitually crossed his hands behind his back. When he thought he had said something striking or gallànt, he rose imperceptibly on the points of his toes twice, and dropped back heavily on his heels, as if to emphasize what he said. In the midst of an argument he might be seen turning round upon himself and walking off a few steps, as if he had gone to find objections with which he returned upon his adversary brusquely. He never interrupted, and was sometimes a victim to this careful observance of civility; for others would take the words out of his mouth, and the good man had to yield his ground with-

out opening his lips. His great experience in commercial matters had given him a few fixed habits, which some people called eccentricities. If a note were overdue he sent for the bailiff, and thought only of recovering capital, interest, and costs; and the bailiff was ordered to pursue the matter until the debtor went into bankruptcy. César then stopped all proceedings, never appeared at any meeting of creditors, and held on to his securities. He adopted this system and his implacable contempt for bankrupts from Monsieur Ragon, who in the course of his commercial life had seen such loss of time in litigation that he had come to look upon the meagre and uncertain dividends obtained by such compromises as fully counterbalanced by a better employment of the time spent in coming and going, in making proposals, or in listening to excuses for dishonesty.

"If the bankrupt is an honest man, and recovers himself, he will pay you," Ragon would say. "If he is without means and simply unfortunate, why torment him? If he is a scoundrel, you will never get anything. Your known severity will make you seem uncompromising; it will be impossible to negotiate with you; consequently you are the one who will get paid as long as there is anything to pay with."

César came to all appointments at the expected hour; but if he were kept waiting, he left ten minutes later with an inflexibility which nothing ever changed. Thus his punctuality compelled all persons who had dealings with him to be punctual themselves.

The dress adopted by the worthy man was in keeping with his manners and his countenance. No power could have made him give up the white muslin cravats,

with ends embroidered by his wife or daughter, which hung down beneath his chin. His waistcoat of white piqué, squarely buttoned, came down low over his stomach, which was rather protuberant, for he was somewhat fat. He wore blue trousers, black silk stockings, and shoes with ribbon ties, which were often unfastened. His surtout coat, olive-green and always too large, and his broad-brimmed hat gave him the air of a Quaker. When he dressed for the Sunday evening festivities he put on silk breeches, shoes with gold buckles, and the inevitable square waistcoat, whose front edges opened sufficiently to show a pleated shirt-frill. His coat, of maroon cloth, had wide flaps and long skirts. Up to the year 1819 he kept up the habit of wearing two watch-chains, which hung down in parallel lines; but he only put on the second when he dressed for the evening.

Such was César Birotteau; a worthy man, to whom the fates presiding at the birth of men had denied the faculty of judging politics and life in their entirety, and of rising above the social level of the middle classes; who followed ignorantly the track of routine, whose opinions were all imposed upon him from the outside and applied by him without examination. Blind but good, not spiritual but deeply religious, he had a pure heart. In that heart there shone one love, the light and strength of his life; for his desire to rise in life, and the limited knowledge he had gained of the world, both came from his affection for his wife and for his daughter.

As for Madame César, then thirty-seven years old, she bore so close a resemblance to the Venus of Milo that all who knew her recognized the likeness when the

Duc de Rivière sent the beautiful statue to Paris. In a few months sorrows were to dim with yellowing tints that dazzling fairness, to hollow and blacken the bluish circle round the lovely greenish-gray eyes so cruelly that she then wore the look of an old Madonna; for amid the coming ruin she retained her gentle sincerity, her pure though saddened glance; and no one ever thought her less than a beautiful woman, whose bearing was virtuous and full of dignity. At the ball now planned by César she was to shine with a last lustre of beauty, remarked upon at the time and long remembered.

Every life has its climax, — a period when causes are at work, and are in exact relation to results. This midday of life, when living forces find their equilibrium and put forth their productive powers with full effect, is common not only to organized beings but to cities, nations, ideas, institutions, commerce, and commercial enterprises, all of which, like noble races and dynasties, are born and rise and fall. From whence comes the vigor with which this law of growth and decay applies itself to all organized things in this lower world? Death itself, in times of scourge, has periods when it advances, slackens, sinks back, and slumbers. Our globe is perhaps only a rocket a little more continuing than the rest. History, recording the causes of the rise and fall of all things here below, could enlighten man as to the moment when he might arrest the play of all his faculties; but neither the conquerors, nor the actors, nor the women, nor the writers in the great drama will listen to the salutary voice.

César Birotteau, who might with reason think himself at the apogee of his fortunes, used this crucial pause

as the point of a new departure. He did not know, moreover neither nations nor kings have attempted to make known in characters ineffaceable, the cause of the vast overthrows with which history teems, and of which so many royal and commercial houses offer signal examples. Why are there no modern pyramids to recall ceaselessly the one principle which dominates the common-weal of nations and of individual life? *When the effect produced is no longer in direct relation nor in equal proportion to the cause, disorganization has begun.* And yet such monuments stand everywhere; it is tradition and the stones of the earth which tell us of the past, which set a seal upon the caprices of indomitable destiny, whose hand wipes out our dreams, and shows us that all great events are summed up in one idea. Troy and Napoleon are but poems. May this present history be the poem of middle-class vicissitudes, to which no voice has given utterance because they have seemed poor in dignity, enormous as they are in volume. It is not one man with whom we are now to deal, but a whole people, or world, of sorrows.

III.

CÉSAR'S last thought as he fell asleep was a fear that his wife would make peremptory objections in the morning, and he ordered himself to get up very early and escape them. At the dawn of day he slipped out noiselessly, leaving his wife in bed, dressed quickly, and went down to the shop just as the boy was taking down the numbered shutters. Birotteau, finding himself alone, the clerks not having appeared, went to the doorway to see how the boy, named Raguet, did his work, — for Birotteau knew all about it from experience. In spite of the sharp air the weather was beautiful.

"Popinot, get your hat, put on your shoes, and call Monsieur Célestin; you and I will go and have a talk in the Tuileries," he said, when he saw Anselme come down.

Popinot, the admirable antipodes of du Tillet, apprenticed to César by one of those lucky chances which lead us to believe in a Sub-Providence, plays so great a part in this history that it becomes absolutely necessary to sketch his profile here. Madame Ragon was a Popinot. She had two brothers. One, the youngest of the family, was at this time a judge in the Lower courts of the Seine, — courts which take cognizance of all civil contests involving sums above a certain amount. The eldest, who was in the wholesale wool-trade, lost his

property and died, leaving to the care of Madame Ragon and his brother an only son, who had lost his mother at his birth. To give him a trade, Madame Ragon placed her nephew at "The Queen of Roses," hoping he might some day succeed Birotteau. Anselme Popinot was a little fellow and club-footed, — an infirmity bestowed by fate on Lord Byron, Walter Scott, and Monsieur de Talleyrand, that others so afflicted might suffer no discouragement. He had the brilliant skin, with frequent blotches, which belongs to persons with red hair; but his clear brow, his eyes the color of a grey-veined agate, his pleasant mouth, his fair complexion, the charm of his modest youth and the shyness which grew out of his deformity, all inspired feelings of protection in those who knew him: we love the weak, and Popinot was loved. Little Popinot — everybody called him so — belonged to a family essentially religious, whose virtues were intelligent, and whose lives were simple and full of noble actions. The lad himself, brought up by his uncle the judge, presented a union of qualities which are the beauty of youth; good and affectionate, a little shame-faced though full of eagerness, gentle as a lamb but energetic in his work, devoted and sober, he was endowed with the virtues of a Christian in the early ages of the Church.

When he heard of a walk in the Tuileries, — certainly the most eccentric proposal that his august master could have made to him at that hour of the day, — Popinot felt sure that he must intend to speak to him about setting up in business. He thought suddenly of Césarine, the true queen of roses, the living sign of the house, whom he had loved from the day when

he was taken into Birotteau's employ, two months before the advent of du Tillet. As he went upstairs he was forced to pause; his heart swelled, his arteries throbbed violently. However, he soon came down again, followed by Célestin, the head-clerk. Anselme and his master turned without a word in the direction of the Tuileries.

Popinot was twenty-one years old. Birotteau himself had married at that age. Anselme therefore could see no hindrance to his marriage with Césarine, though the wealth of the perfumer and the beauty of the daughter were immense obstacles in the path of his ambitious desires: but love gets onward by leaps of hope, and the more absurd they are the greater faith it has in them; the farther off was the mistress of Anselme's heart, the more ardent became his desires. Happy the youth who in those levelling days when all hats looked alike, had contrived to create a sense of distance between the daughter of a perfumer and himself, the scion of an old Parisian family! In spite of all his doubts and fears he was happy: did he not dine every day beside Césarine? So, while attending to the business of the house, he threw a zeal and energy into his work which deprived it of all hardship; doing it for the sake of Césarine, nothing tired him. Love, in a youth of twenty, feeds on devotion.

"He is a true merchant; he will succeed," César would say to Madame Ragon, as he praised Anselme's activity in preparing the work at the factory, or boasted of his readiness in learning the niceties of the trade, or recalled his arduous labors when shipments had to be made, and when, with his sleeves rolled up and his

arms bare, the lame lad packed and nailed up, himself alone, more cases than all the other clerks put together.

The well-known and avowed intentions of Alexandre Crottat, head-clerk to Roguin, and the wealth of his father, a rich farmer of Brie, were certainly obstacles in the lad's way; but even these were not the hardest to conquer. Popinot buried in the depths of his heart a sad secret, which widened the distance between Césarine and himself. The property of the Ragons, on which he might have counted, was involved, and the orphan lad had the satisfaction of enabling them to live by making over to them his meagre salary. Yet with all these drawbacks he believed in success! He had sometimes caught a glance of dignified approval from Césarine; in the depths of her blue eyes he had dared to read a secret thought full of caressing hopes. He now walked beside César, heaving with these ideas, trembling, silent, agitated, as any young lad might well have been by such an occurrence in the burgeoning time of youth.

"Popinot," said the worthy man, "is your aunt well?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"She has seemed rather anxious lately. Does anything trouble her? Listen, my boy; you must not be too reticent with me. I am half one of the family. I have known your uncle Ragon thirty-five years. I went to him in hob-nailed shoes, just as I came from my village. That place is called Les Trésorières, but I can tell you that all my worldly goods were one louis, given me by my godmother the late Marquise d'Uxelles,

a relation of Monsieur le Duc and Madame la Duchesse de Lenoncourt, who are now customers of ours. I pray every Sunday for her and for all her family; I send yearly to her niece in Touraine, Madame de Mortsauf, all her perfumery. I get a good deal of custom through them; there's Monsieur de Vandenesse who spends twelve hundred francs a year with us. If I were not grateful out of good feeling, I ought to be so out of policy; but as for you Anselme, I wish you well for your own sake, and without any other thought."

"Ah, monsieur! if you will allow me to say so, you have got a head of gold."

"No, no, my boy, that's not it. I don't say that my head-piece is n't as good as another's; but the thing is, I've been honest, — *tenaciously!* I've kept to good conduct; I never loved any woman except my wife. Love is a famous *vehicle*, — happy word used by Monsieur Villele in the tribune yesterday."

"Love!" exclaimed Popinot. "Oh, monsieur! can it be — "

"Bless me! there's Père Roguin, on foot at this hour, at the top of the Place Louis XV. I wonder what he is doing there!" thought César, forgetting all about Anselme and the oil of nuts.

The suspicions of his wife came back to his mind; and instead of turning in to the Tuileries Gardens, Birotteau walked on to meet the notary. Anselme followed his master at a distance, without being able to define the reason why he suddenly felt an interest in a matter so apparently unimportant, and full of joy at the encouragement he derived from César's mention of the hob-nailed shoes, the one louis, and love.

In times gone by, Roguin — a large stout man, with a pimpled face, a very bald forehead, and black hair — had not been wanting in a certain force of character and countenance. He had once been young and daring; beginning as a mere clerk, he had risen to be a notary; but at this period his face showed, to the eyes of a keen observer, certain haggard lines, and an expression of weariness in the pursuit of pleasure. When a man plunges into the mire of excesses it is seldom that his face shows no trace of it. In the present instance the lines of the wrinkles and the heat of the complexion were markedly ignoble. Instead of the pure glow which suffuses the tissues of a virtuous man and stamps them, as it were, with the flower of health, the impurities of his blood could be seen to master the soundness of his body. His nose was ignominiously shortened like those of men in whom scrofulous humors, attacking that organ, produce a secret infirmity which a virtuous queen of France innocently believed to be a misfortune common to the whole human race, for she had never approached any man but the king sufficiently near to become aware of her blunder. Roguin hoped to conceal this misfortune by the excessive use of snuff, but he only increased the trouble which was the principal cause of his disasters.

Is it not a too-prolonged social flattery to paint men forever under false colors, and never to reveal the actual causes which underlie their vicissitudes, caused as they so often are by maladies? Physical evil, considered under the aspect of its moral ravages, examined as to its influence upon the mechanism of life, has been perhaps too much neglected by the historians of the

social kingdom. Madame César had guessed the secret of Roguin's household.

From the night of her marriage, the charming and only daughter of the banker Chevrel conceived for the unhappy notary an insurmountable antipathy, and wished to apply at once for a divorce. But Roguin, happy in obtaining a rich wife with five hundred thousand francs of her own, to say nothing of expectations, entreated her not to institute an action for divorce, promising to leave her free, and to accept all the consequences of such an agreement. Madame Roguin thus became sovereign mistress of the situation, and treated her husband as a courtesan treats an elderly lover. Roguin soon found his wife too expensive, and like other Parisian husbands he set up a private establishment of his own, keeping the cost, in the first instance, within the limits of moderate expenditure. In the beginning he encountered, at no great expense, grisettes who were glad of his protection; but for the past three years he had fallen a prey to one of those unconquerable passions which sometimes invade the whole being of a man between fifty and sixty years of age. It was roused by a magnificent creature known as *la belle Hollandaise* in the annals of prostitution, for into that gulf she was to fall back and become a noted personage through her death. She was originally brought from Bruges by a client of Roguin, who soon after left Paris in consequence of political events, presenting her to the notary in 1815. Roguin bought a house for her in the Champs-Élysées, furnished it handsomely, and in trying to satisfy her costly caprices had gradually eaten up his whole fortune.

The gloomy look on the notary's face, which he hastened to lay aside when he saw Birotteau, grew out of certain mysterious circumstances which were at the bottom of the secret fortune so rapidly acquired by du Tillet. The scheme originally planned by that adventurer had changed on the first Sunday when he saw, at Birotteau's house, the relations existing between Monsieur and Madame Roguin. He had come there not so much to seduce Madame César as to obtain the offer of her daughter's hand by way of compensation for frustrated hopes, and he found little difficulty in renouncing his purpose when he discovered that César, whom he supposed to be rich, was in point of fact comparatively poor. He set a watch on the notary, wormed himself into his confidence, was presented to la belle Hollandaise, made a study of their relation to each other, and soon found that she threatened to renounce her lover if he limited her luxuries. La belle Hollandaise was one of those mad-cap women who care nothing as to where the money comes from, or how it is obtained, and who are capable of giving a ball with the gold obtained by a parricide. She never thought of the morrow; for her the future was after dinner, and the end of the month eternity, even if she had bills to pay. Du Tillet, delighted to have found such a lever, exacted from la belle Hollandaise a promise that she would love Roguin for thirty thousand francs a year instead of fifty thousand, — a service which infatuated old men seldom forget.

One evening, after a supper where the wine flowed freely, Roguin unbosomed himself to du Tillet on the subject of his financial difficulties. His own estate was

tied up and legally settled on his wife, and he had been led by his fatal passion to take from the funds intrusted to him by his clients a sum which was already more than half their amount. When the whole were gone, the unfortunate man intended to blow out his brains, hoping to mitigate the disgrace of his conduct by making a demand upon public pity. A fortune, rapid and sure, darted before du Tillet's eyes like a flash of lightning in a saturnalian night. He promptly reassured Roguin, and made him fire his pistols into the air.

"With such risks as yours," he said, "a man of your calibre should not behave like a fool and walk on tiptoe, but speculate — boldly."

He advised Roguin to take a large sum from the remaining trust-moneys and give it to him, du Tillet, with permission to stake it bravely on some large operation, either at the Bourse, or in one of the thousand enterprises of private speculation then about to be launched. Should he win, they were to form a banking-house, where they could turn to good account a portion of the deposits, while the profits could be used by Roguin for his pleasures. If luck went against them, Roguin was to get away and live in foreign countries, and trust to *his friend* du Tillet, who would be faithful to him to the last sou. It was a rope thrown to a drowning man, and Roguin did not perceive that the perfumer's clerk had flung it round his neck.

Master of Roguin's secret, du Tillet made use of it to establish his power over wife, mistress, and husband. Madame Roguin, when told of a disaster she was far from suspecting, accepted du Tillet's attentions, who about this time left his situation with Birotteau, confi-

dent of future success. He found no difficulty in persuading the mistress to risk a certain sum of money as a provision against the necessity of resorting to prostitution if misfortunes overtook her. The wife, on the other hand, regulated her accounts, and gathered together quite a little capital, which she gave to the man whom her husband confided in; for by this time the notary had given a hundred thousand francs of the remaining trust-money to his accomplice. Du Tillet's relations to Madame Roguin then became such that her interest in him was transformed into affection and finally into a violent passion. Through his three sleeping-partners Ferdinand naturally derived a profit; but not content with that profit, he had the audacity, when gambling at the Bourse in their name, to make an agreement with a pretended adversary, a man of straw, from whom he received back for himself certain sums which he charged as losses to his clients. As soon as he had gained fifty thousand francs he was sure of fortune. He had the eye of an eagle to discern the phases through which France was then passing. He played low during the campaign of the allied armies, and high on the restoration of the Bourbons. Two months after the return of Louis XVIII., Madame Roguin was worth two hundred thousand francs, du Tillet three hundred thousand, and the notary had been able to get his accounts once more into order.

La belle Hollandaise wasted her share of the profits; for she was secretly a prey to an infamous scoundrel named Maxime de Trailles, a former page of the Emperor. Du Tillet discovered the real name of this woman in drawing out a deed. She was Sarah Gobseck.

Struck by the coincidence of the name with that of a well-known usurer, he went to the old money-lender (that providence of young men of family) to find out how far he would back the credit of his relation. The Brutus of usurers was implacable towards his great-niece, but du Tillet himself pleased him by posing as Sarah's banker, and having funds to invest. The Norman nature and the rapacious nature suited each other. Gobseck happened to want a clever young man to examine into an affair in a foreign country. It chanced that an auditor of the Council of State, overtaken by the return of the Bourbons and anxious to stand well at court, had gone to Germany and bought up all the debts contracted by the princes during the emigration. He now offered the profits of the affair, which to him was merely political, to any one who would reimburse him. Gobseck would pay no money down, unless in proportion to the redemption of the debts, and insisted on a careful examination of the affair. Usurers never trust any one; they demand vouchers. With them the bird in the hand is everything; icy when they have no need of a man, they are wheedling and inclined to be gracious when they can make him useful.

Du Tillet knew the enormous underground part played in the world by such men as Werbrust and Gigonnet, commercial money-lenders in the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin; by Palma, banker in the Faubourg Poissonnière, — all of whom were closely connected with Gobseck. He accordingly offered a cash security, and obtained an interest in the affair, on condition that these gentlemen would use in their commercial loans certain moneys he should place in

their hands. By this means he strengthened himself with a solid support on all sides.

Du Tillet accompanied Monsieur Clément Chardin des Lupeaulx to Germany during the Hundred Days, and came back at the second Restoration, having done more to increase his means of making a fortune than augmented the fortune itself. He was now in the secret councils of the sharpest speculators in Paris; he had secured the friendship of the man with whom he had examined into the affair of the debts, and that clever juggler had laid bare to him the secrets of legal and political science. Du Tillet possessed one of those minds which understand at half a word, and he completed his education during his travels in Germany. On his return he found Madame Roguin faithful to him. As to the notary, he longed for Ferdinand with as much impatience as his wife did, for la belle Hollandaise had once more ruined him. Du Tillet questioned the woman, but could find no outlay equal to the sum dissipated. It was then that he discovered the secret which Sarah had carefully concealed from him, — her mad passion for Maxime de Trailles, whose earliest steps in a career of vice showed him for what he was, one of those good-for-nothing members of the body politic who seem the necessary evil of all good government, and whose love of gambling renders them insatiable. On making this discovery, du Tillet at once saw the reason of Gobseck's insensibility to the claims of his niece.

Under these circumstances du Tillet the banker (for Ferdinand was now a banker) advised Roguin to lay up something against a rainy day, by persuading his clients to invest in some enterprise which might enable

him to put by for himself large sums of money, in case he were forced to go into bankruptcy through the affairs of the bank. After many ups and downs, which were profitable to none but Madame Roguin and du Tillet, Roguin heard the fatal hour of his insolvency and final ruin strike. His misery was then worked upon by his faithful friend. Ferdinand invented the speculation in lands about the Madeleine. The hundred thousand francs belonging to César Birotteau, which were in the hands of the notary, were made over to du Tillet; for the latter, whose object was to ruin the perfumer, had made Roguin understand that he would run less risk if he got his nearest friends into the net. "A friend," he said, "is more considerate, even if angry."

Few people realize to-day how little value the lands about the Madeleine had at the period of which we write; but at that time they were likely to be sold even below their then value, because of the difficulty of finding purchasers willing to wait for the profits of the enterprise. Now, du Tillet's aim was to seize the profits speedily without the losses of a protracted speculation. In other words, his plan was to strangle the speculation and get hold of it as a dead thing, which he might galvanize back to life when it suited him. In such a scheme the Gobsecks, Palmas, and Werbrusts would have been ready to lend a hand, but du Tillet was not yet sufficiently intimate with them to ask their aid; besides, he wanted to hide his own hand in conducting the affair, that he might get the profits of his theft without the shame of it. He felt the necessity of having under his thumb one of those living lay-figures called in commercial language a "man of straw." His former tool at the

Bourse struck him as a suitable person for the post; he accordingly trenched upon Divine right, and created a man. Out of a former commercial traveller, who was without means or capacity of any kind, except that of talking indefinitely on all subjects and saying nothing, who was without a farthing or a chance to make one, — able, nevertheless, to understand a part and act it without compromising the play or the actors in it, and possessed of a rare sort of honor, that of keeping a secret and letting himself be dishonored to screen his employers, — out of such a being du Tillet now made a banker, who set on foot and directed vast enterprises; the head, namely, of the house of Claparon.

The fate of Charles Claparon would be, if du Tillet's scheme ended in bankruptcy, a swift deliverance to the tender mercies of Jews and Pharisees; and he well knew it. But to a poor devil who was despondently roaming the boulevard with a future of forty sous in his pocket when his old comrade du Tillet chanced to meet him, the little gains that he was to get out of the affair seemed an Eldorado. His friendship, his devotion, to du Tillet, increased by unreflecting gratitude and stimulated by the wants of a libertine and vagabond life, led him to say *amen* to everything. Having sold his honor, he saw it risked with so much caution that he ended by attaching himself to his old comrade as a dog to his master. Claparon was an ugly poodle, but as ready to jump as Curtius. In the present affair he was to represent half the purchasers of the land, while César Birotteau represented the other half. The notes which Claparon was to receive from Birotteau were to be discounted by one of the usurers whose name

du Tillet was authorized to use, and this would send César headlong into bankruptcy so soon as Roguin had drawn from him his last funds. The assignees of the failure would, as du Tillet felt certain, follow his cue; and he, already possessed of the property paid over by the perfumer and his associates, could sell the lands at auction and buy them in at half their value with the funds of Roguin and the assets of the failure. The notary went into this scheme believing that he should enrich himself by the spoliation of Birotteau and his copartners; but the man in whose power he had placed himself intended to take, and eventually did take, the lion's share. Roguin, unable to sue du Tillet in any of the courts, was glad of the bone flung to him, month by month, in the recesses of Switzerland, where he found nymphs at a reduction. Circumstances, actual facts, and not the imagination of a tragic author inventing a catastrophe, gave birth to this horrible scheme. Hatred without a thirst for vengeance is like a seed falling on stony ground; but vengeance vowed to a César by a du Tillet is a natural movement of the soul. If it were not, then we must deny the warfare between the angels of light and the spirits of darkness.

Du Tillet could not very easily assassinate the man who knew him to be guilty of a petty theft, but he could fling him into the mire and annihilate him so completely that his word and testimony would count for nothing. For a long time revenge had germinated in his heart without budding; for the men who hate most are usually those who have little time in Paris to make plans; life is too fast, too full, too much at the mercy

of unexpected events. But such perpetual changes, though they hinder premeditation, nevertheless offer opportunity to thoughts lurking in the depths of a purpose which is strong enough to lie in wait for their tidal chances. When Roguin first confided his troubles to du Tillet, the latter had vaguely foreseen the possibility of destroying César, and he was not mistaken. Forced at last to give up his mistress, the notary drank the dregs of his philter from a broken chalice. He went every day to the Champs Elysées returning home early in the morning. The suspicions of Madame César were justified.

From the moment when a man consents to play the part which du Tillet had allotted to Roguin, he develops the talents of a comedian; he has the eye of a lynx and the penetration of a seer; he magnetizes his dupe. The notary had seen Birotteau some time before Birotteau had caught sight of him; when the perfumer did see him, Roguin held out his hand before they met.

"I have just been to make the will of a great personage who has only eight days to live," he said, with an easy manner. "They have treated me like a country doctor, — fetched me in a carriage, and let me walk home on foot."

These words chased away the slight shade of suspicion which clouded the face of the perfumer, and which Roguin had been quick to perceive. The notary was careful not to be the first to mention the land speculation; his part was to deal the last blow.

"After wills come marriage contracts," said Birotteau. "Such is life. Apropos, when do we marry the Made-

leine? Hey! hey! papa Roguin," he added, tapping the notary on the stomach.

Among men the most chaste of bourgeois have the ambition to appear rakish.

"Well, if it is not to-day," said the notary with a diplomatic air, "then never. We are afraid that the affair may get wind. I am much urged by two of my wealthiest clients, who want a share in the speculation. There it is, to take or leave. This morning I shall draw the deeds. You have till one o'clock to make up your mind. Adieu; I am just on my way to read over the rough draught which Xandrot has been making out during the night.

"Well, my mind is made up. I pass my word," said Birotteau, running after the notary and seizing his hand. "Take the hundred thousand francs which were laid by for my daughter's portion."

"Very good," said Roguin, leaving him.

For a moment, as Birotteau turned to rejoin little Popinot, he felt a fierce heat in his entrails, the muscles of his stomach contracted, his ears buzzed.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" asked the clerk, when he saw his master's pale face.

"Ah, my lad! I have just with one word decided on a great undertaking; no man is master of himself at such a moment. You are a party to it. In fact, I brought you here that we might talk of it at our ease; no one can overhear us. Your aunt is in trouble; how did she lose her money? Tell me."

"Monsieur, my uncle and aunt put all their property into the hands of Monsieur de Nucingen, and they were forced to accept as security certain shares in the mines

at Wortschin, which as yet pay no dividends; and it is hard at their age to live on hope."

"How do they live, then?"

"They do me the great pleasure of accepting my salary."

"Right, right, Anselme!" said the perfumer, as a tear rolled down his cheek. "You are worthy of the regard I feel for you. You are about to receive a great recompense for your fidelity to my interests."

As he said these words the worthy man swelled in his own eyes as much as he did in those of Popinot, and he uttered them with a plebeian and naïve emphasis which was the genuine expression of his counterfeit superiority.

"Ah, monsieur! have you guessed my love for —"

"For whom?" asked his master.

"For Mademoiselle Césarine."

"Ah, boy, you are bold indeed!" exclaimed Birotteau. "Keep your secret. I promise to forget it. You leave my house to-morrow. I am not angry with you; in your place — the devil! the devil! — I should have done the same. She is so lovely!"

"Oh, monsieur!" said the clerk, who felt his shirt getting wet with perspiration.

"My boy, this matter is not one to be settled in a day. Césarine is her own mistress, and her mother has fixed ideas. Control yourself, wipe your eyes, hold your heart in hand, and don't let us talk any more about it. I should not blush to have you for my son-in-law. The nephew of Monsieur Popinot, a judge of the civil courts, nephew of the Ragons, you have the right to make your way as well as anybody; but there are *buts* and *ifs* and

hows and *whys*. What a devil of a dog you have let loose upon me, in the midst of a business conversation! Here, sit down on that chair, and let the lover give place to the clerk. Popinot, are you a loyal man?" he said, looking fixedly at the youth. "Do you feel within you the nerve to struggle with something stronger than yourself, and fight hand to hand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"To maintain a long and dangerous battle?"

"What for?"

"To destroy Macassar Oil!" said Birotteau, rising on his toes like a hero in Plutarch. "Let us not mistake; the enemy is strong, well intrenched, formidable! Macassar Oil has been vigorously launched. The conception was strong. The square bottles were original; I have thought of making ours triangular. Yet on the whole I prefer, after ripe reflection, smaller bottles of thin glass, incased in wicker; they would have a mysterious look, and customers like things which puzzle them."

"They would be expensive," said Popinot. "We must get things out as cheap as we can, so as to make a good reduction at wholesale."

"Good, my lad! That's the right principle. But now, think of it. Macassar Oil will defend itself; it is specious; the name is seductive. It is offered as a foreign importation; and we have the ill-luck to belong to our own country. Come, Popinot, have you the courage to kill Macassar? Then begin the fight in foreign lands. It seems that Macassar is really in the Indies. Now, is n't it much better to supply a French product to the Indians than to send them back what

they are supposed to send us? Make the venture. Begin the fight in India, in foreign countries, in the departments. Macassar Oil has been thoroughly advertised; we must not underrate its power, it has been pushed everywhere, the public knows it."

"I'll kill it!" cried Popinot, with fire in his eyes.

"What with?" said Birotteau. "That's the way with ardent young people. Listen till I've done."

Anselme fell into position like a soldier presenting arms to a marshal of France.

"Popinot, I have invented an oil to stimulate the growth of hair, to titillate the scalp, to revive the color of male and female tresses. This cosmetic will not be less successful than my Paste or my Lotion. But I don't intend to work it myself. I think of retiring from business. It is you, my boy, who are to launch my Oil Comagène, — from the latin word *coma*, which signifies 'hair,' as Monsieur Alibert, the King's physician, says. The word is found in the tragedy of Bérénice, where Racine introduces a king of Comagène, lover of the queen so celebrated for the beauty of her hair; the king — no doubt as a delicate flattery — gave the name to his country. What wit and intellect there is in genius! it condescends to the minutest details."

Little Popinot kept his countenance as he listened to this absurd flourish, evidently said for his benefit as an educated young man.

"Anselme, I have cast my eyes upon you as the one to found a commercial house in the high-class druggist line, Rue des Lombards. I will be your secret partner, and supply the funds to start with. After the Oil Comagène, we will try an essence of

vanilla and the spirit of peppermint. We'll tackle the drug-trade by revolutionizing it, by selling its products concentrated instead of selling them raw. Ambitious young man, are you satisfied?"

Anselme could not answer, his heart was full; but his eyes, filled with tears, answered for him. The offer seemed prompted by indulgent fatherhood, saying to him: "Deserve Césarine by becoming rich and respected."

"Monsieur," he answered at last, "I will succeed!"

"That's what I said at your age," cried the perfumer; "that was my motto. If you don't win my daughter, at least you will win your fortune. Eh, boy! what is it?"

"Let me hope that in acquiring the one I may obtain the other."

"I can't prevent you from hoping, my friend," said Birotteau, touched by Anselme's tone.

"Well, then, monsieur, can I begin to-day to look for a shop, so as to start at once?"

"Yes, my son. To-morrow we will shut ourselves up in the workshop, you and I. Before you go to the Rue des Lombards, call at Livingston's and ask if my hydraulic press will be ready to use to-morrow morning. To-night we will go, about dinner-time, to the good and illustrious Monsieur Vauquelin and consult him. He has lately been employed in studying the composition of hair; he has discovered the nature of the coloring matter and whence it comes; also the structure of the hair itself. The secret is just there, Popinot, and you shall know it; all we have to do is to work it out cleverly. Before you go to Livingston's, just stop

at Pieri Bérard's. My lad, the disinterested kindness of Monsieur Vauquelin is one of the sorrows of my life. I cannot make him accept any return. Happily, I found out from Chiffreville that he wished for the Dresden Madonna, engraved by a man named Muller. After two years correspondence with Germany, Bérard has at last found one on Chinese paper before lettering. It cost fifteen hundred francs, my boy. To-day, my benefactor will see it in his antechamber when he bows us out; it is to be all framed, and I want you to see about it. We — that is, my wife and I — shall thus recall ourselves to his mind; as for gratitude, we have prayed to God for him daily for sixteen years. I can never forget him; but you see, Popinot, men buried in the depths of science do forget everything, — wives, friends, and those they have benefited. As for us plain people, our lack of mind keeps our hearts warm at any rate. That's the consolation for not being a great man. Look at those gentlemen of the Institute, — all brain; you will never meet one of them in a church. Monsieur Vauquelin is tied to his study or his laboratory; but I like to believe he thinks of God in analyzing the works of His hands. — Now, then, it is understood; I give you the money and put you in possession of my secret; we will go shares, and there's no need for any papers between us. Hurrah for success! we'll act in concert. Off with you, my boy! As for me, I've got my part to attend to. One minute, Popinot. I give a great ball three weeks hence; get yourself a dress-coat, and look like a merchant already launched."

This last kindness touched Popinot so deeply that he caught César's big hand and kissed it; the worthy soul

had flattered the lover by this confidence, and people in love are capable of anything.

"Poor boy!" thought Birotteau, as he watched him hurrying across the Tuileries. "Suppose Césarine should love him? But he is lame, and his hair is the color of a warming-pan. Young girls are queer; still, I don't think that Césarine — And then her mother wants to see her the wife of a notary. Alexandre Crottat can make her rich; wealth makes everything bearable, and there is no happiness that won't give way under poverty. However, I am resolved to leave my daughter mistress of herself, even if it seems a folly."

IV.

Birotteau's neighbor was a small dealer in umbrellas, parasols, and canes, named Cayron, — a man from Languedoc, doing a poor business, whom César had several times befriended. Cayron wished nothing better than to confine himself to the ground-floor and let the rich perfumer take the floor above it, thus diminishing his rent.

"Well, neighbor," said Birotteau familiarly, as he entered the man's shop, "my wife consents to the enlargement of our premises. If you like, we will go and see Monsieur Molineux at eleven o'clock."

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," said the umbrella-man, "I have not asked you any compensation for this cession; but you are aware that a good merchant ought to make money out of everything."

"What the devil!" cried Birotteau. "I'm not made of money. I don't know that my architect can do the thing at all. He told me that before concluding my arrangements I must know whether the floors were on the same level. Then, supposing Monsieur Molineux does allow me to cut a door in the wall, is it a party-wall? Moreover, I have to turn my staircase, and make a new landing, so as to get a passage-way on the same floor. All that costs money, and I don't want to ruin myself."

"Oh, monsieur," said the southerner. "Before you are ruined, the sun will have married the earth and they'll have had children."

Birotteau stroked his chin, rose on the points of his toes, and fell back upon his heels.

"Besides," resumed Cayron "all I ask you to do is to cash these securities for me — "

And he held out sixteen notes amounting in all to five thousand francs.

"Ah!" said the perfumer turning them over. "Small fry, two months, three months — "

"Take them as low as six per cent," said the umbrella-man humbly.

"Am I a usurer?" asked the perfumer reproachfully.

"What can I do, monsieur? I went to your old clerk, du Tillet, and he would not take them at any price. No doubt he wanted to find out how much I'd be willing to lose on them."

"I don't know those signatures," said the perfumer.

"We have such queer names in canes and umbrellas; they belong to the peddlers."

"Well, I won't say that I will take all; but I'll manage the short ones."

"For the want of a thousand francs — sure to be repaid in four months — don't throw me into the hands of the blood-suckers who get the best of our profits; do take all, monsieur! I do so little in the way of discount that I have no credit; that is what kills us little retailers."

"Well, I'll cash your notes; Célestin will make out the account. Be ready at eleven, will you? There's my architect, Monsieur Grindot," said the perfumer,

catching sight of the young man, with whom he had made an appointment at Monsieur de la Billardière's the night before.

"Contrary to the custom of men of talent you are punctual, monsieur," said César, displaying his finest commercial graces. "If punctuality, in the words of our king, — a man of wit as well as a statesman, — is the politeness of princes, it is also the wealth of merchants. Time, time, is gold, especially to you artists. I permit myself to say to you that architecture is the union of all the arts. We will not enter through the shop," he added, opening the private door of his house.

Four years earlier Monsieur Grindot had carried off the *grand prix* in architecture, and had lately returned from Rome where he had spent three years at the cost of the State. In Italy the young man had dreamed of art; in Paris he thought of fortune. Government alone can pay the needful millions to raise an architect to glory; it is therefore natural that every ambitious youth of that calling, returning from Rome and thinking himself a Fontaine or a Percier, should bow before the administration. The liberal student became a royalist, and sought to win the favor of influential persons. When a *grand prix* man behaves thus, his comrades call him a trimmer. The young architect in question had two ways open to him, — either to serve the perfumer well, or put him under contribution. Birotteau the deputy-mayor, Birotteau the future possessor of half the lands about the Madeleine, where he would sooner or later build up a fine neighborhood, was a man to keep on good terms with. Grindot accordingly resolved to sacrifice his immediate gains to his future interests.

He listened patiently to the plans, the repetitions, and the ideas of this worthy specimen of the bourgeois class, the constant butt of the witty shafts and ridicule of artists, and the object of their everlasting contempt, nodding his head as if to show the perfumer that he caught his ideas. When César had thoroughly explained everything, the young man proceeded to sum up for him his own plan.

"You have now three front windows on the first floor, besides the window on the staircase which lights the landing; to these four windows you mean to add two on the same level in the next house, by turning the staircase, so as to open a way from one house to the other on the street side."

"You have understood me perfectly," said the perfumer, surprised.

"To carry out your plan, you must light the new staircase from above, and manage to get a porter's lodge beneath it."

"Beneath it?"

"Yes, the space over which it rests —"

"I understand, monsieur."

"As for your own appartement, give me carte-blanche to arrange and decorate it. I wish to make it worthy —"

"Worthy! You have said the word, monsieur."

"How much time do you give me to complete the work?"

"Twenty days."

"What sum do you mean to put in the workmen's pockets?" asked Grindot.

"How much do you think it will cost?"

"An architect can estimate on a new building almost to a farthing," answered the young man; "but as I don't know how to deal with a bourgeois — ah! excuse me, monsieur, the word slipped out — I must warn you that it is impossible to calculate the costs of tearing down and rebuilding. It will take at least eight days before I can give even an approximate idea of them. Trust yourself to me: you shall have a charming staircase, lighted from above, with a pretty vestibule opening from the street, and in the space under the stairway — "

"Must that be used?"

"Don't be worried — I will find room for a little porter's lodge. Your house shall be studied and remodelled *con amore*. Yes, monsieur, I look to art and not to fortune. Above all things I do not want fame before I have earned it. To my mind, the best means of winning credit is not to play into the hands of contractors, but to get at good effects cheaply."

"With such ideas, young man," said Birotteau in a patronizing tone, "you will succeed."

"Therefore," resumed Grindot, "employ the masons, painters, locksmiths, carpenters, and upholsterers yourself. I will simply look over their accounts. Pay me only two thousand francs commission. It will be money well laid out. Give me the premises to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and have your workmen on the spot."

"How much will it cost, at a rough guess?" said Birotteau.

"From ten to twelve thousand francs," said Grindot. "That does not count the furniture; of course you will

renew that. Give me the address of your cabinet-maker; I shall have to arrange with him about the choice of colors, so as to have everything in keeping."

"Monsieur Braschon, Rue Saint-Antoine, takes my orders," said Birotteau, assuming a ducal air.

The architect wrote down the address in one of those pretty note-books which invariably come from women.

"Well," said Birotteau, "I trust to you, monsieur; only you must wait till the lease of the adjoining house is made over to me, and I get permission to cut through the wall."

"Send me a note this evening," said the architect; "it will take me all night to draw the plans — we would rather work for a bourgeois than for the King of Prussia, that is to say for ourselves. I will now take the dimensions, the pitch, the size of the windows, the pictures — "

"It must be finished on the appointed day," said Birotteau. "If not, no pay."

"It shall be done," said the architect. "The workmen must do without sleep; we will use drying oil in the paint. But don't let yourself be taken in by the contractors; always ask their price in advance, and have a written agreement."

"Paris is the only place in the world where you can wave a magic wand like that," said Birotteau, with an Asiatic gesture worthy of the Arabian Nights. "You will do me the honor to come to my ball, monsieur? Men of talent are not all disdainful of commerce; and you will meet a scientific man of the first order, Monsieur Vauquelin of the Institute; also Monsieur de la

Billardière, Monsieur le comte de Fontaine, Monsieur Lebas, judge and president of the Court of commerce, various magistrates, Monsieur le comte de Grandville of the royal suite, Monsieur Popinot of the Lower court, Monsieur Camusot of the Court of commerce, and Monsieur Cardot, his father-in-law, and, perhaps, Monsieur le duc de Lenoncourt, first gentleman of the bed-chamber to the king. I assemble my friends as much — to celebrate the emancipation of our territory — as to commemorate my — promotion to the order of the Legion of honor," — here Grindot made a curious gesture. "Possibly I showed myself worthy of that — signal — and royal — favor, by my services on the bench, and by fighting for the Bourbons upon the steps of Saint-Roch on the 13th Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon. These claims —"

Constance, in a morning gown, here came out of her daughter's bedroom, where she had been dressing; her first glance cut short César's eloquence just as he was about to formulate in flowing phrase, though modestly, the tale of his merits.

"*Tiens, mimi*, this is Monsieur *de* Grindot, a young man distinguished in his own sphere of life, and the possessor of a great talent. Monsieur is the architect recommended to us by Monsieur de la Billardière to superintend our *little* alterations."

The perfumer slipped behind his wife and made a sign to the architect to take notice of the word *little*, putting his finger on his lips. Grindot took the cue.

"Will it be very expensive?" said Constance to the architect.

"Oh, no, madame; six thousand francs at a rough guess."

"A rough guess!" exclaimed Madame Birotteau. "Monsieur, I entreat you, begin nothing without an estimate and the specifications signed. I know the ways of contractors: six thousand francs means twenty thousand. We are not in a position to commit such extravagance. I beg you, monsieur, — though of course my husband is master in his own house, — give him time to reflect."

"Madame, monsieur the deputy-mayor has ordered me to deliver the premises, all finished, in twenty days. If we delay, you will be likely to incur the expense without obtaining the looked-for result."

"There are expenses and expenses," said the handsome mistress of "The Queen of Roses."

"Ah! madame, do you think an architect who seeks to put up public buildings finds it glorious to decorate a mere appartement? I have come down to such details merely to oblige Monsieur de la Billardière; and if you fear — "

Here he made a movement to retreat.

"Well, well, monsieur," said Constance re-entering her daughter's room, where she threw her head on Césarine's shoulder.

"Ah, my daughter!" she cried, "your father will ruin himself! He has engaged an architect with mustachios, who talks about public buildings! He is going to pitch the house out of windows and build us a Louvre. César is never idle about his follies; he only spoke to me about it in the night, and he begins it in the morning!"

"Never mind, mamma; let papa do as he likes. The good God has always taken care of him," said Césarine, kissing her mother and sitting down to the piano, to let the architect know that the perfumer's daughter was not ignorant of the fine arts.

When Grindot came in to measure the bedroom he was surprised and taken aback at the beauty of Césarine. Just out of her dressing-room and wearing a pretty morning-gown, fresh and rosy as a young girl is fresh and rosy at eighteen, blond and slender, with blue eyes, Césarine seemed to the young artist a picture of the elasticity, so rare in Paris, that fills and rounds the delicate cheek, and tints with the color adored of painters, the tracery of blue veins throbbing beneath the whiteness of her clear skin. Though she lived in the lymphatic atmosphere of a Parisian shop, where the air stagnates and the sun seldom shines, her habits gave her the same advantages which the open-air life of Rome gives to the Transteverine peasant-woman. Her hair, — which was abundant, and grew, like that of her father, in points upon her forehead, — was caught up in a twist which showed the lines of a well-set neck, and then rippled downward in curls that were scrupulously cared for, after the fashion of young shop-women, whose desire to attract attention inspires the truly English minutiæ of their toilet. The beauty of this young girl was not the beauty of an English lady, nor of a French duchess, but the round and glowing beauty of a Flemish Rubens. Césarine had the turned-up nose of her father, but it was piquant through the delicacy of its modelling, — like those noses, essentially French, which have been sc

well reproduced by Largillière. Her skin, of a firm full texture, bespoke the vitality of a virgin; she had the fine brow of her mother, but it was clear with the serenity of a young girl who knows no care. Her liquid blue eyes, bathed in rich fluid, expressed the tender grace of a glowing happiness. If that happiness took from her head the poetry which painters insist on giving to their pictures by making them a shade too pensive, the vague physical languor of a young girl who has never left her mother's side made up for it, and gave her a species of ideality. Notwithstanding the graceful lines of her figure, she was strongly built. Her feet betrayed the peasant origin of her father and her own defects of race, as did the redness of her hands, the sign of a thoroughly bourgeois life. Sooner or later she would grow stout. She had caught the sentiment of dress from the elegant young women who came to the shop, and had learned from them certain movements of the head, certain ways of speaking and of moving; and she could play the well-bred woman in a way that turned the heads of all the young men, especially the clerks, in whose eyes she appeared truly distinguished. Popinot swore tbat he would have no other wife than Césarine. The liquid brightness of that eye, which a look, or a tone of reproach, might cause to overflow in tears, was all that kept him to a sense of masculine superiority. The charming girl inspired love without leaving time to ask whether she had mind enough to make it durable. But of what value is the thing they call in Paris *mind* to a class whose principal element of happiness is virtue and good sense?

In her moral qualities Césarine was like her mother, somewhat bettered by the superfluities of education; she loved music, drew the Madonna della Sedia in chalk, and read the works of Mmes. Cottin and Riccoboni, of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Fénelon, and Racine. She was never seen behind the counter with her mother except for a few moments before sitting down to dinner, or on some special occasion when she replaced her. Her father and mother, like all persons who have risen from small beginnings, and who cultivate the ingratitude of their children by putting them above themselves, delighted in deifying Césarine, who happily had the virtues of her class, and took no advantage of their weakness.

Madame Birotteau followed the architect with an anxious and appealing eye, watching with terror, and pointing out to her daughter, the fantastic movements of the four-foot rule, that wand of architects and builders, with which Grindot was measuring. She saw in those mysterious wavings a conjuring spirit that augured evil; she wished the walls were less high, the rooms less large, and dared not question the young man on the effects of his sorcery.

"Do not be afraid, madame, I shall carry nothing off," said the artist, laughing.

Césarine could not help smiling.

"Monsieur," said Constance, in a supplicating voice, not even noticing the tit-for-tat of the young man, "consider economy, and later we may be able to serve you—"

Before starting to see Monsieur Molineux, the owner of the adjoining house, César wished to get from Roguin

the private deed about the transference of the lease which Alexandre Crottat had been ordered to draw up. As he left the notary's house, he saw du Tillet at the window of Roguin's study. Although the *liaison* of his former clerk with the lawyer's wife made it not unlikely that he should see du Tillet there at this hour when the negotiations about the Madeleine were going on, Birotteau, in spite of his extreme confidence, felt uneasy. The excited manner of du Tillet seemed the sign of a discussion. "Can he be in it?" thought César, with a flash of commercial prudence. The suspicion passed like lightning through his mind. He looked again and saw Madame Roguin, and the presence of du Tillet was no longer suspicious. "Still, suppose Constance were right?" he said to himself. "What a fool I am to listen to women's notions! I'll speak of it to my uncle Pillerault this morning; it is only a step from the Cour Batave, where Monsieur Molineux lives, to the Rue des Bourdonnais."

A cautious observer, or a merchant who had met with swindlers in his business career, would have been saved by this sight; but the antecedents of Birotteau, the incapacity of his mind, which had little power to follow up the chain of inductions by which a superior man reaches a conclusion, all conspired to blind him. He found the umbrella-man in full dress, and they were about to start, when Virginie, the cook, caught him by the arm: —

"Monsieur, madame does not wish you to go out —"

"Pshaw!" said Birotteau, "more women's notions!"

"— without your coffee, which is ready."

"That's true. My neighbor," he said to Cayron, "I have so many things in my head that I can't think of my stomach. Do me the kindness to go forward; we will meet at Monsieur Molineux' door, unless you are willing to go up and explain matters to him, which would save time."

Monsieur Molineux was a grotesque little man, living on his rents, — a species of being that exists nowhere but in Paris, like a certain lichen which grows only in Iceland. This comparison is all the more apt because he belonged to a mixed nature, to an animal-vegetable kingdom which some modern Mercier might build up of cryptogams that push up upon, and flower, and die in or under the plastered walls of the strange unhealthy houses where they prefer to cluster. The first aspect of this human plant — umbelliferous, judging by the fluted blue cap which crowned it, with a stalk encased in greenish trousers, and bulbous roots swathed in list shoes — offered to the eye a flat and faded countenance, which certainly betrayed nothing poisonous. In this queer product might be recognized the typical stockholder, who believes every report which the daily press baptizes with ink, and is content, for all response, to say, "Read what the papers say," — the bourgeois, essentially the friend of order, always revolting in his moral being against power, though always obeying it; a creature feeble in the mass but fierce in isolated circumstances, hard as a constable when his own rights are in question, yet giving fresh chickweed to his bird and fish-bones to his cat, interrupting the signing of a lease to whistle to a canary, suspicious as a jailer, but apt to put his money into a bad business and then

endeavor to get it back by niggardly avarice. The evil savor of this hybrid flower was only revealed by use; its nauseous bitterness needed the stewing of some business in which his interests were mingled with those of other men, to bring it fully out. Like all Parisians, Molineux had the lust of dominating; he craved the share of sovereignty which is exercised more or less by every one, even a porter, over a greater or lesser number of victims, — over wife, children, tenants, clerks, horses, dogs, monkeys, to whom they send, on the rebound, the mortifications they have endured in the higher spheres to which they aspired.

This annoying old man had neither wife, child, nephew, or niece. He bullied his servant-of-all-work too much to make her a victim; for she escaped all contact with her master by doing her work and keeping out of his way. His appetite for tyranny was thus balked; and to satisfy it in some way he patiently studied the laws relating to rentals and party-walls; he fathomed the jurisprudence which regulates the dwellings of Paris in an infinite number of petty questions as to tenants, abutters, liabilities, taxes, repairs, sweepings, decorations for the Fête-Dieu, waste-pipes, lighting, projections over the public way, and the neighborhood of unhealthy buildings. His means, his strength, in fact his whole mind was spent in keeping his proprietary rights on a complete war-footing. He had made it an amusement, and the amusement had become a monomania. He was fond of protecting citizens against the encroachment of illegal proceedings; but finding such subjects of complaint rare, he had finally turned upon his own tenants. A tenant became his

enemy, his inferior, his subject, his vassal; he laid claim to his subservience, and looked upon any man as a brute who passed him on the stairway without speaking. He wrote out his bills for rent himself, and sent them on the morning of the day they fell due. The debtor who was behindhand in his payment received a legal notice to quit at an appointed time. Then followed seizures, law-suits, costs, and the whole judicial array set in motion with the rapidity of what the head's-man calls the "mechanism." Molineux granted neither grace nor time; his heart was a callus in the direction of a lease.

"I will lend you the money if you want it," he would say to a man he thought solvent, "but pay my rent; all delays carry with them a loss of interest for which the law does not indemnify us."

After long study of the caprices and capers of tenants who persisted, after the fashion of dynasties, in upsetting the arrangements of their predecessors, he had drawn up a charter of his own and followed it religiously. In accordance therewith, the old fellow made no repairs: no chimney ever smoked, the stairs were clean, the ceilings white, the cornices irreproachable, the floors firm on their joists, the paint satisfactory; the locks were never more than three years old, not a pane of glass was missing, there were no cracks, and he saw no broken tiles until a tenant vacated the premises. When he met the tenants on their first arrival he was accompanied by a locksmith and a painter and glazier, — very convenient folks, as he remarked. The lessee was at liberty to make improvements; but if the unhappy man did so, little Molineux thought night and day of

how he could dislodge him and relet the improved appartement on better terms. He watched and waited and spun the web of his mischievous legal proceedings. He knew all the tricks of Parisian legislation in the matter of leases. Factious and fond of scribbling, he wrote polite and specious letters to his tenants; but at the bottom of all his civil sentences might be seen, as in his faded and cozening face, the soul of a Shylock. He always demanded six months' rent in advance, to be deducted from the last quarter of the lease under an array of prickly conditions which he invented. If new tenants offered themselves, he got information about them from the police; for he would not have people of certain callings, — he was afraid, for instance, of hammers. When the lease was to be signed, he kept the deed and spelled it over for a week, fearing what he called the *et cætera* of lawyers.

Outside of his notions as a proprietor, Jean-Baptiste Molineux seemed good and obliging. He played at boston without complaining of the players; he laughed at the things which make a bourgeois laugh; talked of what others of his kind talked about, — the arbitrary powers of bakers who nefariously sell false weights, of the police, of the heroic seventeen deputies of the Left. He read the "Good Sense" of the Curé Meslier, and went to Mass; not that he had any choice between deism and Christianity, but he took the wafer when offered to him, and argued that he was therefore safe from the interfering claims of the clergy. The indefatigable litigant wrote letters on this subject to the newspapers, which the newspapers did not insert and never answered. He was in other respects one of those

estimable bourgeois who solemnly put Christmas logs on their fire, draw kings at play, invent April-fools, stroll on the boulevards when the weather is fine, go to see the skating, and are always to be found on the terrace of the Place Louis XV. at two o'clock on the days of the fireworks, with a roll in their pockets so that they may get and keep a front place.

The Cour Batave, where the little old man lived, is the product of one of those fantastic speculations of which no man can explain the meaning after they are once completed. This cloistral structure, with arcades and interior galleries built of free-stone, with a fountain at one end, — a parched fountain, which opens its lion's mouth less to give water than to ask it from the passers-by, — was doubtless invented to endow the Saint-Denis quarter with a species of Palais-Royal. The place, unhealthy and buried on all four sides by the high walls of its houses, has no life or movement except in the daytime ; it is a central spot where dark passages meet, and connect the quarter of the markets with the Saint-Martin quarter by means of the famous Rue Quincampoix, — damp ways in which hurried foot-passengers contract rheumatism. But at night no spot in Paris is more deserted ; it might be called the catacombs of commerce. In it there are various industrial *cloaca*, very few Dutchmen, but a great many grocers. The appartements in this merchant-palace have, naturally, no other outlook than that of the common court on which all the windows give, so that rents are at a minimum.

Monsieur Molineux lived in one of the angles, on the sixth floor for sanitary reasons, the air not being pure at a less height than seventy feet above the ground.

At this altitude the worthy proprietor enjoyed an enchanting view of the windmills of Montmartre as he walked among the gutters on the roof, where he cultivated flowers, in spite of police regulations against the hanging gardens of our modern Babylon. His appartement was made up of four rooms, without counting the precious *anglaises* on the floor above him of which he had the key; they belonged to him, he had made them, and he felt he was legally entitled to them. On entering his appartement, a repulsive barenness plainly showed the avarice of the owner: in the antechamber were six straw chairs and a porcelain stove; on the walls, which were covered with a bottle-green paper, were four engravings bought at auction. In the dining-room were two sideboards, two cages full of birds, a table covered with oil-cloth, a barometer, a window-door which opened on the hanging gardens, and chairs of dark mahogany covered with horse-hair. The salon had little curtains of some old green-silk stuff, and furniture of painted white-wood covered with green worsted velvet. As to the chamber of the old celibate it was furnished with Louis XV. articles, so dirty and disfigured through long usage that a woman dressed in white would have been afraid of soiling herself by contact with them. The chimney-piece was adorned by a clock with two columns, between which was a dial-case that served as a pedestal to Pallas brandishing her lance: a myth. The floor was covered with plates full of scraps intended for the cats, on which there was much danger of stepping. Above a chest of drawers in rosewood hung a portrait done in pastel, — Molineux in his youth. There were also books, tables covered with

shabby green bandboxes, on a bracket a number of his deceased canaries stuffed; and, finally, a chilly bed that might formerly have belonged to a carmelite.

César Birotteau was delighted with the extreme politeness of Molineux, whom he found wrapped in a gray woollen dressing-gown, watching his milk in a little metal heater on the edge of his fireplace, while his coffee-grounds were boiling in a little brown earthenware jug from which, every now and then, he poured a few drops into his coffee-pot. The umbrella-man, anxious not to disturb his landlord, had gone to the door to admit Birotteau. Molineux held the mayors and deputies of the city of Paris in much esteem: he called them "my municipal officers." At sight of the magistrate he rose, and remained standing, cap in hand, until the great Birotteau was seated.

"No, monsieur; yes, monsieur; ah, monsieur, if I had known I should have had the honor of receiving in the bosom of my humble *penates* a member of the municipality of Paris, believe me I should have made it my duty to call upon you, although I am your landlord — or, on the point of becoming so."

Birotteau made him a sign to put on his cap.

"No, I shall not; not until you are seated, and have replaced yours, if you feel the cold. My room is chilly, the smallness of my means not permitting — God grant your wishes!" he added, as Birotteau sneezed while he felt in his pockets for the deeds. In presenting them to Molineux César remarked, to avoid all unnecessary delay, that Monsieur Roguin the notary had drawn them up.

"I do not dispute the legal talents of Monsieur Roguin, an old name well-known in the notariat of Paris; but I have my own little customs, I do my own business (an excusable hobby), and my notary is—"

"But this matter is very simple," said the perfumer, who was used to the quick business methods of merchants.

"Simple!" cried Molineux. "Nothing is simple in such matters. Ah! you are not a landlord, monsieur, and you may think yourself happy. If you knew to what lengths of ingratitude tenants can go, and to what precautions we are driven! Why, monsieur, I once had a tenant—"

And for a quarter of an hour he recounted how a Monsieur Gendrin, designer, had deceived the vigilance of his porter, Rue Saint-Honoré. Monsieur Gendrin had committed infamies worthy of Marat,—obscene drawings at which the police winked. This Gendrin, a profoundly immoral artist, had brought in women of bad lives, and made the staircase intolerable,—conduct worthy of a man who made caricatures of the government. And why such conduct? Because his rent had been asked for on the 15th! Gendrin and Molineux were about to have a lawsuit, for, though he did not pay, Gendrin insisted on holding the empty appartement. Molineux received anonymous letters, no doubt from Gendrin, which threatened him with assassination some night in the passages about the Cour Batave.

"It has got to such a pass, monsieur," he said, winding up the tale, "that monsieur the prefect of police, to whom I confided my trouble (I profited

by the occasion to drop him a few words on the modifications which should be introduced into the laws to meet the case), has authorized me to carry pistols for my personal safety."

The little old man got up and fetched the pistols.

"There they are!" he cried.

"But, monsieur, you have nothing to fear from me," said Birotteau, looking at Cayron, and giving him a glance and a smile intended to express pity for such a man.

Molineux detected it; he was mortified at such a look from an officer of the municipality, whose duty it was to protect all persons under his administration. In any one else he might have pardoned it, but in Birotteau the deputy-mayor, never!

"Monsieur," he said in a dry tone, "an esteemed commercial judge, a deputy-mayor, and an honorable merchant would not descend to such petty meannesses, — for they are meannesses. But in your case there is an opening through the wall which must be agreed to by your landlord, Monsieur le comte de Grandville; there are stipulations to be made and agreed upon about replacing the wall at the end of your lease. Besides which, rents have hitherto been low, but they are rising; the Place Vendôme is looking up, the Rue Castiglione is to be built upon. I am binding myself — binding myself down!"

"Let us come to a settlement," said Birotteau, amazed. "How much do you want? I know business well enough to be certain that all your reasons can be silenced by the superior consideration of money. Well, how much is it?"

"That's only fair, monsieur the deputy. How much longer does your own lease run?"

"Seven years," answered Birotteau.

"Think what my first floor will be worth in seven years!" said Molineux. "Why, what would two furnished rooms let for in that quarter? — more than two hundred francs a month perhaps! I am binding myself — binding myself by a lease. The rent ought to be fifteen hundred francs. At that price I will consent to the transfer of the two rooms by Monsieur Cayron, here present," he said, with a sly wink at the umbrella-man; "and I will give you a lease of them for seven consecutive years. The costs of piercing the wall are to belong to you; and you must procure the consent of Monsieur le comte de Grandville and the cession of all his rights in the matter. You are responsible for all damage done in making this opening. You will not be expected to replace the wall yourself, that will be my business; but you will at once pay me five hundred francs as an indemnity towards it. We never know who may live or die, and I can't run after anybody to get the wall rebuilt."

"Those conditions seem to me pretty fair," said Birotteau.

"Next," said Molineux. "You must pay me seven hundred and fifty francs, *hic et hunc*, to be deducted from the last six months of your lease; this will be acknowledged in the lease itself. Oh, I will accept small bills for the value of the rent at any date you please! I am prompt and square in business. We will agree that you are to close up the door on my staircase (where you are to have no right of entry), at your own

cost, in masonry. Don't fear, — I shall ask you no indemnity for that at the end of your lease; I consider it included in the five hundred francs. Monsieur, you will find me just."

"We merchants are not so sharp," said the perfumer. "It would not be possible to do business if we made so many stipulations."

"Oh, in business, that is very different, especially in perfumery, where everything fits like a glove," said the old fellow with a sour smile; "but when you come to letting houses in Paris, nothing is unimportant. Why, I have a tenant in the Rue Montorgueil who —"

"Monsieur," said Birotteau, "I am sorry to detain you from your breakfast: here are the deeds, correct them. I agree to all that you propose, we will sign them to-morrow; but to-day let us come to an agreement by word of mouth, for my architect wants to take possession of the premises in the morning."

"Monsieur," resumed Molineux with a glance at the umbrella-merchant, "part of a quarter has expired; Monsieur Cayron would not wish to pay it; we will add it to the rest, so that your lease may run from January to January. It will be more in order."

"Very good," said Birotteau.

"And the five per cent for the porter —"

"But," said Birotteau, "if you deprive me of the right of entrance, that is not fair."

"Oh, you are a tenant," said little Molineux, peremptorily, up in arms for the principle. "You must pay the tax on doors and windows and your share in all the other charges. If everything is clearly

understood there will be no difficulty. You must be doing well, monsieur; your affairs are prospering?"

"Yes," said Birotteau. "But my motive is, I may say, something different. I assemble my friends as much to celebrate the emancipation of our territory as to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor —"

"Ah! ah!" said Molineux, "a recompense well-deserved!"

"Yes," said Birotteau, "possibly I showed myself worthy of that signal and royal favor by my services on the Bench of commerce, and by fighting for the Bourbons upon the steps of Saint-Roch on the 13th Vendémiaire. These claims —"

"Are equal to those of our brave soldiers of the old army. The ribbon is red, for it is dyed with their blood."

At these words, taken from the "Constitutionnel," Birotteau could not keep from inviting little Molineux to the ball, who thanked him profusely and felt like forgiving the disdainful look. The old man conducted his new tenant as far as the landing, and overwhelmed him with politeness. When Birotteau reached the middle of the Cour Batave he gave Cayron a merry look.

"I did not think there could exist such — weak beings!" he said, with difficulty keeping back the word *fools*.

"Ah, monsieur!" said Cayron, "it is not everybody that has your talents."

Birotteau might easily believe himself a superior being in the presence of Monsieur Molineux; the answer of the umbrella-man made him smile agreeably,

and he bowed to him with a truly royal air as they parted.

"I am close by the Markets," thought César; "I'll attend to the matter of the nuts."

After an hour's search, Birotteau, who was sent by the market-women to the Rue de Lombards where nuts for sugarplums were to be found, heard from his friend Matifat that the fruit in bulk was only to be had of a certain Madame Angélique Madou, living in the Rue Perrin-Gasselin, the sole establishment which kept the true filbert of Provence, and the veritable white hazel-nut of the Alps.

The Rue Perrin-Gasselin is one of the narrow thoroughfares in a square labyrinth enclosed by the quay, the Rue Saint-Denis, the Rue de la Ferronnerie, and the Rue de la Monnaie; it is, as it were, one of the entrails of the city. There swarm an infinite number of heterogeneous and mixed articles of merchandise, evil-smelling and jaunty, herrings and muslin, silks and honey, butter and gauze, and above all a number of petty trades, of which Paris knows as little as a man knows of what is going on in his pancreas, and which, at the present moment, had a blood-sucker named Bidault, otherwise called Gigonnet, a money-lender, who lived in the Rue Grenétat. In this quarter old stables were filled with oil-casks, and the carriage-houses were packed with bales of cotton. Here were stored in bulk the articles that were sold at retail in the markets.

Madame Madou, formerly a fish-woman, but thrown, some ten years since, into the dried-fruit trade by a

liaison with the former proprietor of her present business (an affair which had long fed the gossip of the markets), had originally a vigorous and enticing beauty, now lost however in a vast embonpoint. She lived on the lower floor of a yellow house, which was falling to ruins, and was held together at each story by iron crossbars. The deceased proprietor had succeeded in getting rid of all competitors, and had made his business a monopoly. In spite of a few slight defects of education, his heiress was able to carry it along, and take care of her stores, which were in coachhouses, stables, and old workshops, where she fought the vermin with eminent success. Not troubled with desk or ledgers, for she could neither read nor write, she answered a letter with a blow of her fist, considering it an insult. In the main she was a good woman, with a high-colored face, and a foulard tied over her cap, who mastered with bugle voice the wagoners when they brought the merchandise; such squabbles usually ending in a bottle of the "right sort." She had no disputes with the agriculturists who consigned her the fruit, for they corresponded in ready money, — the only possible method of communication, to receive which Mère Madou paid them a visit in the fine season of the year.

Birotteau found this shrewish trader among sacks of filberts, nuts, and chestnuts.

"Good-morning, my dear lady," said Birotteau with a jaunty air.

"*Your* dear!" she said. "Hey! my son, what's there agreeable between us? Did we ever mount guard over kings and queens together?"

"I am a perfumer, and what is more I am deputy-mayor of the second arrondissement; thus, as magistrate and as customer, I request you to take another tone with me."

"I marry when I please," said the virago. "I don't trouble the mayor, or bother his deputies. As for my customers, they adore me, and I talk to 'em as I choose. If they don't like it, they can snake off elsewhere."

"This is the result of monopoly," thought Birotteau.

"Popole! — that's my godson, — he must have got into mischief. Have you come about him, my worthy magistrate?" she said, softening her voice.

"No; I had the honor to tell you that I came as a customer."

"Well, well! and what's your name, my lad? Have n't seen you about before, have I?"

"If you take that tone, you ought to sell your nuts cheap," said Birotteau, who proceeded to give his name and all his distinctions.

"Ha! you're the Birotteau that's got the handsome wife. And how many of the sweet little nuts may you want, my love?"

"Six thousand weight."

"That's all I have," said the seller, in a voice like a hoarse flute. "My dear monsieur, you are not one of the sluggards who waste their time on girls and perfumes. God bless you, you've got something to do! Excuse me a bit. You'll be a jolly customer, dear to the heart of the woman I love best in the world."

"Who is that?"

"Hey! the dear Madame Madou."

"What's the price of your nuts?"

"For you, old fellow, twenty-five francs a hundred, if you take them all."

"Twenty-five francs!" cried Birotteau. "Fifteen hundred francs! I shall want perhaps a hundred thousand a year."

"But just look how fine they are; fresh as a daisy," she said, plunging her red arm into a sack of filberts. "Plump, no empty ones, my dear man. Just think! grocers sell their beggarly trash at twenty-four sous a pound, and in every four pounds they put a pound of *hollows*. Must I lose my profits to oblige you? You 're nice enough, but you don't please me all that! If you want so many, we might make a bargain at twenty francs. I don't want to send away a deputy-mayor, — bad luck to the brides, you know! Now, just handle those nuts; heavy, are n't they? Less than fifty to the pound; no worms there, I can tell you."

"Well, then, send six thousand weight, for two thousand francs at ninety days' sight, to my manufactory, Rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, to-morrow morning early."

"You 're in as great a hurry as a bride! Well, adieu, monsieur the mayor; don't bear me a grudge. But if it is all the same to you," she added, following Birotteau through the yard, "I would like your note at forty days, because I have let you have them too cheap, and I don't want to lose the discount. Père Gigonnet may have a tender heart, but he sucks the soul out of us as a spider sucks a fly."

"Well, then, fifty days. But they are to be weighed by the hundred pounds, so that there may be no hollow ones. Without that, no bargain."

"Ah, the dog! he knows what he's about," said Madame Madou; "can't make a fool of him! It is those rascals in the Rue des Lombards who have put him up to that! Those big wolves are all in a pack to eat up the innocent lambs."

This lamb was five feet high and three feet round, and she looked like a mile-post, dressed in striped calico, without a belt.

The perfumer, lost in thought, was ruminating as he went along the Rue Saint-Honoré about his duel with Macassar Oil. He was meditating on the labels and the shape of the bottles, discussing the quality of the corks, the color of the placards. And yet people say there is no poetry in commerce! Newton did not make more calculations for his famous binomial than Birotteau made for his Comagène Essence, — for by this time the Oil had subsided into an Essence, and he went from one description to the other without observing any difference. His head spun with his computations, and he took the lively activity of its emptiness for the substantial work of real talent. He was so preoccupied that he passed the turn leading to his uncle's house in the Rue des Bourdonnais, and had to return upon his steps.

V.

Claude-Joseph Pillerault, formerly an ironmonger at the sign of the Cloche d'Or, had one of those faces whose beauty shines from the inner to the outer; about him all things harmonized, — dress and manners, mind and heart, thought and speech, words and acts. He was the sole relation of Madame Birotteau, and had centred all his affections upon her and upon Césarine, having lost, in the course of his commercial career, his wife and son, and also an adopted child, the son of his house-keeper. These heavy losses had driven the good man into a kind of Christian stoicism, — a noble doctrine, which gave life to his existence, and colored his latter days with the warm, and at the same time chilling, tones which gild the sunsets of winter. His head, thin and hollowed and swarthy, with ochre and bistre tints harmoniously blended, offered a striking likeness to that which artists bestow on Time, though it vulgarized it; for the habits of commercial life lowered the stern and monumental character which painters, sculptors, and clock-makers exaggerate. Of medium height, Pillerault was more thick-set than stout; Nature had built him for hard work and long life; his broad shoulders showed a strong frame; he was dry by temperament, and his skin had, as it were, no emotions, though it was not insensible. Little demonstrative, as was shown by his

composed face and quiet attitude, the old man had an inward calm not expressed in phrases nor by emphasis. His eye, the pupil of which was green, mingled with black lines, was remarkable for its unalterable clearness. His forehead, wrinkled in straight lines and yellowed by time, was small and narrow, hard, and crowned with silver-gray hair cut so short that it looked like felt. His delicate mouth showed prudence, but not avarice. The vivacity of his eye showed the purity of his life. Integrity, a sense of duty, and true modesty made, as it were, a halo round his head, bringing his face into the relief of a sound and healthful existence.

For sixty years he had led the hard and sober life of a determined worker. His history was like César's, except in happiness. A clerk till thirty years of age, his property was all in his business at the time when César put his savings into the Funds; he had suffered, like others, under the Maximum, and the pickaxes and other implements of his trade had been requisitioned. His reserved and judicious nature, his forethought and mathematical reflection, were seen in his methods of work. The greater part of his business was conducted by word of mouth, and he seldom encountered difficulties. Like all thoughtful people he was a great observer; he let people talk, and then studied them. He often refused advantageous bargains on which his neighbors pounced; later, when they regretted them, they declared that Pillerault had "a nose for swindlers." He preferred small and certain gains to bold strokes which put large sums of money in jeopardy. He dealt in cast-iron chimney backs, gridirons, coarse fire-dogs, kettles and boilers in cast or wrought iron, hoes, and

all the agricultural implements of the peasantry. This line, which was sufficiently unremunerative, required an immense mechanical toil. The gains were not in proportion to the labor; the profits on such heavy articles, difficult to move and expensive to store, were small. He himself had nailed up many a case, packed and unpacked many a bale, unloaded many a wagon. No fortune was ever more nobly won, more legitimate or more honorable, than his. He had never overcharged or sought to force a bargain. In his latter business days he might be seen smoking his pipe before the door of his shop looking at the passers-by, and watching his clerks as they worked. In 1814, the period at which he retired from business, his fortune consisted, in the first place, of seventy thousand francs, which he placed in the public Funds, and from which he derived an income of five thousand and some odd hundred francs a year; next of forty thousand francs, the value of his business, which he had sold to one of his clerks; this sum was to be paid in full at the end of five years, without interest. Engaged for thirty years in a business which amounted to a hundred thousand francs a year, he had made about seven per cent profit on the amount, and his living had absorbed one half of that profit. Such was his record. His neighbors, little envious of such mediocrity, praised his excellence without understanding it.

At the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Saint-Honoré is the café David, where a few old merchants, like Pillerault, take their coffee in the evenings. There, the adoption of the son of his cook had been the subject of a few jests, such as might be addressed to a

man much respected, for the iron-monger inspired respectful esteem, though he never sought it; his inward self-respect sufficed him. So when he lost the young man, two hundred friends followed the body to the cemetery. In those days he was heroic. His sorrow, restrained like that of all men who are strong without assumption, increased the sympathy felt in his neighborhood for the "worthy man," — a term applied to Pillerault in a tone which broadened its meaning and ennobled it. The sobriety of Claude Pillerault, long become a habit, did not yield before the pleasures of an idle life when, on quitting his business, he sought the rest which drags down so many of the Parisian bourgeoisie. He kept up his former ways of life, and enlivened his old age by convictions and interests, which belonged, we must admit, to the extreme Left. Pillerault belonged to that working-men's party which the Revolution had fused with the bourgeoisie. The only blot upon his character was the importance he attached to the triumph of that party; he held to all the rights, to the liberty, and to the fruits of the Revolution; he believed that his peace of mind and his political stability were endangered by the Jesuits, whose secret power was proclaimed aloud by the Liberals, and menaced by the principles with which the "Constitutionnel" endowed Monsieur. He was quite consistent in his life and ideas; there was nothing narrow about his politics; he never insulted his adversaries, he dreaded courtiers and believed in republican virtues; he thought Manuel a pure man, General Foy a great one, Casimir Perier without ambition, Lafayette a political prophet, and Courier a worthy fellow. He had indeed some noble chimeras. The

fine old man lived a family life; he went about among the Ragons, his niece Birotteau, the judge Popinot, Joseph Lebas, and his friend Matifat. Fifteen hundred francs a year sufficed for all his personal wants. As to the rest of his income he spent it on good deeds, and in presents to his great-niece; he gave a dinner four times a year to his friends, at Roland's, Rue du Hasard, and took them afterwards to the theatre. He played the part of those old bachelors on whom married women draw at sight for their amusements, — a country jaunt, the opera, the Montagnes-Beaujon, *et cœtera*. Pillerault was made happy by the pleasure he gave; his joys were in the hearts of others. Though he had sold his business, he did not wish to leave the neighborhood to which all his habits tied him; and he took a small appartement of three rooms in the Rue des Bourdonnais on the fourth floor of an old house.

Just as the moral nature of Molineux could be seen in his strange interior, the pure and simple life of Pillerault was revealed by the arrangements of his modest home, consisting of an antechamber, a sitting-room, and bed-room. Judged by dimensions, it was the cell of a Trappist. The antechamber, with a red-tiled floor, had only one window, screened by a cambric curtain with a red border; mahogany chairs, covered with reddish sheep's leather put on with gilt nails, walls hung with an olive-green paper, and otherwise decorated with the American Declaration of Independence, a portrait of Bonaparte as First Consul, and a representation of the battle of Austerlitz. The salon, decorated undoubtedly by an upholsterer, had a set of furniture with arched tops covered in yellow, a carpet, chimney

ornaments of bronze without gilding, a painted chimney-board, a console bearing a vase of flowers under a glass case, a round table covered with a cloth, on which stood a liqueur-stand. The newness of this room proclaimed a sacrifice made by the old man to the conventions of the world; for he seldom received any one at home. In his bedroom, as plain as that of a monk or an old soldier (the two men best able to estimate life), a crucifix with a basin of holy-water first caught the eye. This profession of faith in a stoical old republican was strangely moving to the heart of a spectator.

An old woman came to do his household work; but his respect for women was so great that he would not let her black his boots, and he subscribed to a boot-black for that service. His dress was simple, and invariably the same. He wore a coat and trousers of dark-blue cloth, a waistcoat of some printed cotton fabric, a white cravat, high shoes, and on gala days he put on a coat with brass buttons. His habits of rising, breakfasting, going out, dining, his evening resorts, and his returning hours were all stamped with the strictest punctuality; for regular habits are the secret of long life and sound health. Politics never came to the surface in his intercourse with César, the Ragons, or the Abbé Loraux; for the good people of that circle knew each other too well to care to enter the region of proselytism. Like his nephew and like the Ragons, he put implicit confidence in Roguin. To his mind the notary was a being worthy of veneration, — the living image of probity. In the affair of the lands about the Madeleine, Pillerault had undertaken a private examination, which was the real cause of the

boldness with which César had combated his wife's presentiments.

The perfumer went up the seventy-eight stairs which led to the little brown door of his uncle's apartment, thinking as he went that the old man must be very hale to mount them daily without complaining. He found a frock-coat and pair of trousers hanging on the hat-stand outside the door. Madame Vaillant brushed and cleaned them while this genuine philosopher, wrapped in a gray woollen garment, breakfasted in his chimney-corner and read the parliamentary debates in the "Constitutionnel" or the "Journal du Commerce."

"Uncle," said César, "the matter is settled; they are drawing up the deeds; but if you have any fears or regrets, there is still time to give it up."

"Why should I give it up? The thing is good; though it may be long before we realize anything, like all safe investments. My fifty thousand francs are in the bank. I received yesterday the last instalment, five thousand francs, from my business. As for the Ragons, they have put their whole fortune into the affair."

"How do they contrive to live?"

"Never mind how; they do live."

"Uncle, I understand!" said Birotteau, deeply moved, pressing the hand of the austere old man.

"How is the affair arranged?" asked Pillerault, brusquely.

"I am in for three eighths, you and the Ragons for one eighth. I shall credit you for that on my books until the question of registration is decided."

"Good! My boy, you must be getting rich to put three hundred thousand francs into it. It seems to me

you are risking a good deal outside of your business. Won't the business suffer? However, that is your affair. If you get a set-back, why the Funds are at eighty, and I could sell two thousand francs worth of my consolidated stock. But take care, my lad; for if you have to come upon me, it will be your daughter's fortune that you will take."

"Ah! my uncle, how simply you say things! You touch my heart."

"General Foy was touching mine in quite another fashion just now. Well, go on; settle the business; lands can't fly away. We are getting them at half price. Suppose we do have to wait six years, there will always be some returns; there are wood-yards which will bring in a rent. We can't really lose anything. There is but one chance against us. Roguin might run off with the money."

"My wife told me so this very night. She fears —"

"That Roguin will carry off our funds?" said Pillerault, laughing. "Pray, why?"

"She says there is too much in his nose; and like all men who can't have women, he is furious to —"

With a smile of incredulity, Pillerault tore a strip from a little book, wrote down an amount, and signed the paper.

"There," said he, "there's a cheque on the Bank of France for a hundred thousand francs for the Ragons and for me. Those poor folks have just sold to your scoundrel of a du Tillet their fifteen shares in the mines at Wortschin to make up the amount. Worthy people in trouble, — it wrings my heart; and such good, noble souls, the very flower of the old bourgeoisie! Their

brother, Popinot the judge, knows nothing about it; they hide it from him so that he may not feel obliged to give up his other works of charity. People who have worked, like me, for forty years!"

"God grant that the Oil of Comagène may triumph!" cried Birotteau. "I shall be doubly happy. Adieu; come and dine on Sunday with the Ragons, Roguin, and Monsieur Claparon. We shall sign the papers day after to-morrow, for to-morrow is Friday, you know, and I should n't like —"

"You don't surely give in to such superstitions?"

"Uncle, I shall never believe that the day on which the Son of God was put to death by man can be a fortunate day. Why, we ourselves stop all business on the twenty-first of January.

"On Sunday, then," said Pillerault brusquely.

"If it were not for his political opinions," thought Birotteau as he went down stairs, "I don't believe he would have his equal here below. What are politics to him? He would be just as well off if he never thought of them. His obstinacy in that direction only shows that there can't be a perfect man."

"Three o'clock already!" cried César, as he got back to "The Queen of Roses."

"Monsieur, do you mean to take these securities?" asked Celestin, showing him the notes of the umbrella-maker.

"Yes; at six per cent, without commission. Wife, get my dressing things all ready; I am going to see Monsieur Vauquelin, — you know why. A white cravat, of course."

Birotteau gave a few orders to the clerks. Not seeing

Popinot, he concluded that his future partner had gone to dress; and he went gayly up to his room, where the Dresden Madonna, magnificently framed according to his orders, awaited him.

"Hey! that's pretty," he said to his daughter.

"Papa, you must say beautiful, or people will laugh at you."

"Upon my word! a daughter who scolds her father! Well, well! To my taste I like Hero and Leander quite as much. The Virgin is a religious subject, suitable for a chapel; but Hero and Leander, ah! I shall buy it, for that flask of oil gave me an idea—"

"Papa, I don't know what you are talking about."

"Virginie! a hackney-coach!" cried César, in stentorian tones, as soon as he had trimmed his beard and seen little Popinot appear, who was dragging his foot timidly because Césarine was there.

The lover had never yet perceived that his infirmity no longer existed in the eyes of his mistress. Delicious sign of love! — which they on whom chance has inflicted a bodily imperfection can alone obtain.

"Monsieur," he said, "the press will be ready to work to-morrow."

"Why, what's the matter, Popinot?" asked César, as he saw Anselme blush.

"Monsieur, it is the joy of having found a shop, a back-shop, kitchen, chambers above them, and store-rooms, — all for twelve hundred francs a year, in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants."

"We must take a lease of eighteen years," said Birotteau. "But let us start for Monsieur Vauquelin's. We can talk as we go."

César and Popinot got into the hackney-coach before the eyes of the astonished clerks, who did not know what to make of these gorgeous toilets and the abnormal coach, ignorant as they were of the great projects revolving in the mind of the master of "The Queen of Roses."

"We are going to hear the truth about nuts," said César, half to himself.

"Nuts?" said Popinot.

"There you have my secret," said the perfumer. "I've let loose the word *nuts*, — all is there. The oil of nuts is the only oil that has any real effect upon hair. No perfumer has ever dreamed of it. I saw an engraving of Hero and Leander, and I said to myself, If the ancients used all that oil on their heads they had some reason for it; for the ancients are the ancients, in spite of all the moderns may say; I stand by Boileau about the ancients. I took my departure from that point and got to the oil of nuts, thanks to your relation, little Bianchon the medical student: he told me that at school his comrades used nut oil to promote the growth of their whiskers and mustachios. All we need is the approval of Monsieur Vauquelin; enlightened by his science, we shall mislead the public. I was in the markets just now, talking to a seller of nuts, so as to get hold of the raw material, and now I am about to meet one of the greatest scientific men in France, to get at the quintessence of that commodity. Proverbs are no fools; extremes meet. Now see, my boy, commerce is the intermediary between the productions of the vegetable kingdom and science. Angélique Madou gathers, Monsieur Vauquelin extracts, we sel

an essence. Nuts are worth five sous a pound, Monsieur Vauquelin will increase their value one hundredfold, and we shall, perhaps, do a service to humanity; for if vanity is the cause of the greatest torments of mankind, a good cosmetic becomes a benefaction."

The religious admiration with which Popinot listened to the father of Césarine stimulated Birotteau's eloquence, who allowed himself to expatiate in phrases which certainly were extremely wild for a bourgeois.

"Be respectful, Anselme," he said, as they reached the street where Monsieur Vauquelin lived, "we are about to enter the sanctuary of science. Put the Virgin in full sight, but not ostentatiously, in the dining-room, on a chair. Pray heaven, I may not get mixed up in what I have to say!" cried César, naïvely. "Popinot, this man has a chemical effect upon me; his voice heats my stomach, and even gives me a slight colic. He is my benefactor, and in a few moments he will be yours."

These words struck Popinot with a cold chill, and he began to step as if he were walking on eggs, looking nervously at the wall. Monsieur Vauquelin was in his study when Birotteau was announced. The academician knew that the perfumer and deputy-mayor was high in favor, and he admitted him.

"You do not forget me in the midst of your distinctions," he said, "there is only a hand's-breadth, however, between a chemist and a perfumer."

"Ah, monsieur! between your genius and the plainness of a man like me there is infinity. I owe to you what you call my distinctions: I shall never forget it in this world, nor in the next."

"Oh! in the next they say we shall be all alike, kings and cobblers."

"Provided kings and cobblers lead a holy life here below," said Birotteau.

"Is that your son?" asked Vauquelin, looking at little Popinot, who was amazed at not seeing anything extraordinary in the sanctum, where he expected to find monstrosities, gigantic engines, flying-machines, and material substances all alive.

"No, monsieur, but a young man whom I love, and who comes to ask a kindness equal to your genius, — and that is infinite," said César with shrewd courtesy. "We have come to consult you, a second time, on an important matter, about which I am as ignorant as a perfumer can be."

"Let me hear what it is."

"I know that hair has lately occupied all your vigils, and that you have given yourself up to analyzing it; while you have thought of glory, I have thought of commerce."

"Dear Monsieur Birotteau, what is it you want of me, — the analysis of hair?" He took up a little paper. "I am about to read before the Academy of Sciences a monograph on that subject. Hair is composed of a rather large quantity of mucus, a small quantity of white oil, a great deal of greenish oil, iron, a few atoms of oxide of manganese, some phosphate of lime, a tiny quantity of carbonate of lime, a little silica, and a good deal of sulphur. The differing proportions of these component parts cause the differences in the color of the hair. Red hair, for instance, has more greenish oil than any other."

César and Popinot opened their eyes to a laughable extent.

"Nine things!" cried Birotteau. "What! are there metals and oils in hair? Unless I heard it from you, a man I venerate, I could not believe it. How amazing! God is great, Monsieur Vauquelin."

"Hair is produced by a follicular organ," resumed the great chemist, — "a species of pocket, or sack, open at both extremities. By one end it is fastened to the nerves and the blood vessels; from the other springs the hair itself. According to some of our scientific brotherhood, among them Monsieur Blainville, the hair is really a dead matter expelled from that pouch, or crypt, which is filled with a species of pulp."

"Then hair is what you might call threads of sweat!" cried Popinot, to whom César promptly administered a little kick on his heels.

Vauquelin smiled at Popinot's idea.

"He knows something, doesn't he?" said César, looking at Popinot. "But, monsieur, if the hair is still-born, it is impossible to give it life, and I am lost! my prospectus will be ridiculous. You don't know how queer the public is; you can't go and tell it —"

"That it has got manure upon its head," said Popinot, wishing to make Vauquelin laugh again.

"Cephalic catacombs," said Vauquelin, continuing the joke.

"My nuts are bought!" cried Birotteau, alive to the commercial loss. "If this is so why do they sell —"

"Don't be frightened," said Vauquelin, smiling, "I see it is a question of some secret about making the hair grow or keeping it from turning gray. Listen!

this is my opinion on the subject, as the result of my studies."

Here Popinot pricked up his ears like a frightened hare.

"The discoloration of this substance, be it living or dead, is, in my judgment, produced by a check to the secretion of the coloring matter; which explains why in certain cold climates the fur of animals loses all color and turns white in winter."

"Hein! Popinot."

"It is evident," resumed Vauquelin, "that alterations in the color of the hair come from changes in the circumjacent atmosphere —"

"Circumjacent, Popinot! recollect, hold fast to that," cried César.

"Yes," said Vauquelin, "from hot and cold changes, or from internal phenomena which produce the same effect. Probably headaches and other cephalagic affections absorb, dissipate, or displace the generating fluids. However, the interior of the head concerns physicians. As for the exterior, bring on your cosmetics."

"Monsieur," said Birotteau, "you restore me to life! I have thought of selling an oil of nuts, believing that the ancients made use of that oil for their hair; and the ancients are the ancients, as you know: I agree with Boileau. Why did the gladiators oil themselves —"

"Olive oil is quite as good as nut oil," said Vauquelin, who was not listening to Birotteau. "All oil is good to preserve the bulb from receiving injury to the substances working within it, or, as we should say in chemistry, in liquefaction. Perhaps you are right:

Dupuytren told me the oil of nuts had a stimulating property. I will look into the differences between the various oils, beech-nut, colza, olive, and hazel, etc."

"Then I am not mistaken," cried Birotteau, triumphantly. "I have coincided with a great man. Macassar is overthrown! Macassar, monsieur, is a cosmetic given — that is, sold, and sold dear — to make the hair grow."

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Vauquelin, "there are not two ounces of Macassar oil in all Europe. Macassar oil has not the slightest action upon the hair; but the Malays buy it up for its weight in gold, thinking that it preserves the hair: they don't know that whale-oil is just as good. No power, chemical, or divine —"

"Divine! oh, don't say that, Monsieur Vauquelin."

"But, my dear monsieur, the first law of God is to be consistent with himself; without unity, no power —"

"Ah! in that light —"

"No power, as I say, can make the hair grow on bald heads; just as you can never dye, without serious danger, red or white hair. But in advertising the benefits of oil you commit no mistake, you tell no falsehood, and I think that those who use it will probably preserve their hair."

"Do you think that the royal Academy of Sciences would approve of —"

"Oh! there is no discovery in all that," said Vauquelin. "Besides, charlatans have so abused the name of the Academy that it would not help you much. My conscience will not allow me to think the oil of nuts a prodigy."

"What would be the best way to extract it; by pressure, or decoction?" asked Birotteau.

"Pressure between two hot slabs will cause the oil to flow more abundantly; but if obtained by pressure between cold slabs it will be of better quality. It should be applied to the skin itself," added Vauquelin, kindly, "and not to the hair; otherwise the effect might be lost."

"Recollect all that, Popinot," said Birotteau, with an enthusiasm that sent a glow into his face. "You see before you, monsieur, a young man who will count this day among the finest in his life. He knew you, he venerated you, without ever having seen you. We often talk of you in our home: a name that is in the heart is often on the lips. We pray for you every day, my wife and daughter and I, as we ought to pray for our benefactor."

"Too much for so little," said Vauquelin, rather bored by the voluble gratitude of the perfumer.

"Ta, ta, ta!" exclaimed Birotteau, "you can't prevent our loving you, you who will take nothing from us. You are like the sun; you give light, and those whom you illuminate can give you nothing in return."

The man of science smiled and rose; the perfumer and Popinot rose also.

"Anselme, look well at this room. You permit it, monsieur? Your time is precious, I know, but he will never have another opportunity."

"Well, have you got all you wanted?" said Vauquelin to Birotteau. "After all, we are both commercial men."

"Pretty nearly, monsieur," said Birotteau, retreating

towards the dining-room, Vauquelin following. "But to launch our Comagène Essence we need a good foundation —"

"'Comagène' and 'Essence' are two words that clash. Call your cosmetic 'Oil of Birotteau;' or, if you don't want to give your name to the world, find some other. Why, there's the Dresden Madonna! Ah, Monsieur Birotteau, do you mean that we shall quarrel?"

"Monsieur Vauquelin," said the perfumer, taking the chemist's hand. "This treasure has no value except the time that I have spent in finding it. We had to ransack all Germany to find it on China paper before lettering. I knew that you wished for it and that your occupations did not leave you the time to search for it; I have been your commercial traveller, that is all. Accept therefore, not a paltry engraving, but efforts, anxieties, despatches to and fro, which are the evidence of my complete devotion. Would that you had wished for something growing on the sides of precipices, that I might have sought it and said to you, 'Here it is!' Do not refuse my gift. We have so much reason to be forgotten; allow me therefore to place myself, my wife, my daughter, and the son-in-law I expect to have, beneath your eyes. You must say when you look at the Virgin, 'There are some people in the world who are thinking of me.'"

"I accept," said Vauquelin.

Popinot and Birotteau wiped their eyes, so affected were they by the kindly tone in which the academician uttered the words.

"Will you crown your goodness?" said the perfumer.

"What's that?" exclaimed Vauquelin.

"I assemble my friends" — he rose from his heels, taking, nevertheless, a modest air — "as much to celebrate the emancipation of our territory as to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor — "

"Ah!" exclaimed Vauquelin, surprised.

"Possibly I showed myself worthy of that signal and royal favor, by my services on the Bench of commerce, and by fighting for the Bourbons upon the steps of Saint-Roch, on the 13th Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon. My wife gives a ball, three weeks from Sunday; pray come to it, monsieur. Do us the honor to dine with us on that day. Your presence would double the happiness with which I receive my cross. I will write you beforehand."

"Well, yes," said Vauquelin.

"My heart swells with joy!" cried the perfumer, when he got into the street. "He comes to my house! I am afraid I've forgotten what he said about hair: do you remember it, Popinot!"

"Yes, monsieur; and twenty years hence I shall remember it still."

"What a great man! what a glance, what penetration!" said Birotteau. "Ah! he made no bones about it; he guessed our thoughts at the first word; he has given us the means of annihilating Macassar oil. Yes! nothing can make the hair grow; Macassar, you lie! Popinot, our fortune is made. We'll go to the manufactory to-morrow morning at seven o'clock; the nuts will be there, and we will press out some oil. It is all very well for him to say that any oil is good; if the public knew that, we should be lost. If we did n't

put some scent and the name of nuts into the oil, how could we sell it for three or four francs the four ounces?"

"You are about to be decorated, monsieur?" said Popinot, "what glory for—"

"Commerce; that is true, my boy."

César's triumphant air, as if certain of fortune, was observed by the clerks, who made signs at each other; for the trip in the hackney-coach, and the full dress of the cashier and his master had thrown them all into the wildest regions of romance. The mutual satisfaction of César and Anselme, betrayed by looks diplomatically exchanged, the glance full of hope which Popinot cast now and then at Césarine, proclaimed some great event and gave color to the conjectures of the clerks. In their busy and half cloistral life the smallest events have the interest which a prisoner feels in those of his prison. The bearing of Madame César, who replied to the Olympian looks of her lord with an air of distrust, seemed to point to some new enterprise; for in ordinary times Madame César, delighted with the smallest routine success, would have shared his contentment. It happened, accidentally, that the receipts for the day amounted to more than six thousand francs; for several outstanding bills chanced to be paid.

The dining-room and the kitchen, lighted from a little court, and separated from the dining-room by a passage, from which the staircase, taken out of a corner of the backshop, opened up, was on the *entresol* where in former days César and Constance had their appartement; in fact, the dining-room, where the honey-moon had been passed, still wore the look of a little salon. During

dinner Raguet, the trusty boy of all work, took charge of the shop; but the clerks came down when the dessert was put on table, leaving César, his wife and daughter to finish their dinner alone by the chimney corner. This habit was derived from the Ragons, who kept up the old-fashioned usages and customs of former commercial days, which placed an enormous distance between the masters and the apprentices. Césarine or Constance then prepared for Birotteau his cup of coffee, which he took sitting on a sofa by the corner of the fire. At this hour he told his wife all the little events of the day, and related what he had seen in the streets, what was going on in the Faubourg du Temple, and the difficulties he had met with in the manufactory, *et cætera*.

"Wife," he said, when the clerks had gone down, "this is certainly one of the most important days in our life! The nuts are bought, the hydraulic press is ready to go to work, the land affair is settled. Here, lock up that cheque on the Bank of France," he added, handing her Pillerault's paper. "The improvements in the house are ordered, the dignity of our appartement is about to be increased. Bless me! I saw, down in the Cour Batave, a very singular man," — and he told the tale of Monsieur Molineux.

"I see," said his wife, interrupting him in the middle of a tirade, "that you have gone in debt two hundred thousand francs."

"That is true, wife," said César, with mock humility, "Good God, how shall we pay them? It counts for nothing that the lands about the Madeleine will some day become the finest quarter of Paris."

"Some day, César!"

"Alas!" he said, going on with his joke, "my three eighths will only be worth a million in six years. How shall I ever pay that two hundred thousand francs?" said César, with a gesture of alarm. "Well, we shall be reduced to pay them with that," he added, pulling from his pocket a nut, which he had taken from Madame Madou and carefully preserved.

He showed the nut between his fingers to Constance and Césarine. His wife was silent, but Césarine, much puzzled, said to her father, as she gave him his coffee, "What do you mean, papa, — are you joking?"

The perfumer, as well as the clerks, had detected during dinner the glances which Popinot had cast at Césarine, and he resolved to clear up his suspicions.

"Well, my little daughter," he said, "this nut will revolutionize our home. From this day forth there will be one person the less under my roof."

Césarine looked at her father with an eye which seemed to say, "What is that to me?"

"Popinot is going away."

Though César was a poor observer, and had, moreover, prepared his phrase as much to herald the creation of the house of A. Popinot and Company, as to set a trap for his daughter, yet his paternal tenderness made him guess the confused feelings which rose in Césarine's heart, blossomed in roses on her cheek, suffused her forehead and even her eyes as she lowered them. César thought that words must have passed between Césarine and Popinot. He was mistaken: the two children comprehended each other, like all timid lovers, without a word.

Some moralists hold that love is an involuntary passion, the most disinterested, the least calculating, of all the passions, except maternal love. This opinion carries with it a vulgar error. Though the majority of men may be ignorant of the causes of love, it is none the less true that all sympathy, moral or physical, is based upon calculations made either by the mind, or by sentiment or brutality. Love is an essentially selfish passion. Self means deep calculation. To every mind which looks only at results, it will seem at first sight singular and unlikely that a beautiful girl like Césarine should love a poor lame fellow with red hair. Yet this phenomenon is completely in harmony with the arithmetic of middle-class sentiments. To explain it, would be to give the reason of marriages which are constantly looked upon with surprise, — marriages between tall and beautiful women and puny men, or between ugly little creatures and handsome men. Every man who is cursed with some bodily infirmity, no matter what it is, — club-feet, a halting-gait, a humped-back, excessive ugliness, claret stains upon the cheek, Roguin's species of deformity, and other monstrosities the result of causes beyond the control of the sufferer, — has but two courses open to him: either he must make himself feared, or he must practise the virtues of exquisite loving-kindness; he is not permitted to float in the middle currents of average conduct which are habitual to other men. If he takes the first course he probably has talent, genius, or strength of will; a man inspires terror only by the power of evil, respect by genius, fear through force of mind. If he chooses the second course, he makes himself adored; he submits to femi

nine tyranny, and knows better how to love than men of irreproachable bodily condition.

Anselme, brought up by virtuous people, by the Ragons, models of the honorable bourgeoisie, and by his uncle the judge, had been led, through his ingenuous nature and his deep religious sentiments, to redeem the slight deformity of his person by the perfection of his character. Constance and César, struck by these tendencies, so attractive in youth, had repeatedly sung his praises before Césarine. Petty as they might be in many ways, husband and wife were noble by nature, and understood the deep things of the heart. Their praises found an echo in the mind of the young girl, who, despite her innocence, had read in Anselme's pure eyes the violent feeling, which is always flattering whatever be the lover's age, or rank, or personal appearance. Little Popinot had far more reason to adore a woman than a handsome man could ever have. If she were beautiful, he would love her madly to his dying day; his fondness would inspire him with ambition; he would sacrifice his own life that his wife's might be happy; he would make her mistress of their home, and be himself the first to accept her sway. Thus thought Césarine, involuntarily perhaps, yet not altogether crudely; she gave a bird's-eye glance at the harvest of love in her own home, and reasoned by induction; the happiness of her mother was before her eyes, — she wished for no better fate; her instinct told her that Anselme was another César, improved by his education, as she had been improved by hers. She dreamed of Popinot as mayor of an arrondissement, and liked to picture herself taking up the collections

in their parish church as her mother did at Saint-Roch. She had reached the point of no longer perceiving the difference between the left leg and the right leg of her lover, and was even capable of saying, in all sincerity, "Does he limp?" She loved those liquid eyes, and liked to watch the effect her own glance had upon them, as they lighted up for a moment with a chaste flame, and then fell, sadly.

Roguin's head-clerk, Alexandre Crottat, who was gifted with the precocious experience which comes from knowledge acquired in a lawyer's office, had an air and manner that was half cynical, half silly, which revolted Césarine, already disgusted by the trite and commonplace character of his conversation. The silence of Popinot, on the other hand, revealed his gentle nature; she loved the smile, partly mournful, with which he listened to trivial vulgarities. The silly nonsense which made him smile filled her with repulsion; they were grave or gay in sympathy. This hidden vantage-ground did not hinder Anselme from plunging into his work; and his indefatigable ardor in it pleased Césarine, for she guessed that when his comrades in the shop said, "Mademoiselle Césarine will marry Roguin's head-clerk," the poor lame Anselme, with his red hair, did not despair of winning her himself. A high hope is the proof of a great love.

"Where is he going?" asked Césarine of her father, trying to appear indifferent.

"He is to set up for himself in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants; and, my faith! by the grace of God!" cried César, whose exclamations were not understood by his wife, nor by his daughter.

When Birotteau encountered a moral difficulty he did as the insects do when there is an obstacle in their way, — he turned either to the right or to the left. He therefore changed the conversation, resolving to talk over Césarine with his wife.

"I told all your fears and fancies about Roguin to your uncle, and he laughed," he said to Constance.

"You should never tell what we say to each other!" cried Constance. "That poor Roguin may be the best man in the world; he is fifty-eight years old, and perhaps he thinks no longer of—"

She stopped short, seeing that Césarine was listening attentively, and made a sign to César.

"Then I have done right to agree to the affair," said Birotteau.

"You are the master," she answered.

César took his wife by the hands and kissed her brow; that answer always conveyed her tacit assent to her husband's projects.

"Now, then," cried the perfumer, to his clerks, when he went back to them, "the shop will be closed at ten o'clock. Gentlemen, lend a hand! a great feat! We must move, during the night, all the furniture from the first floor to the second floor. We shall have, as they say, to put the little pots in the big pots, for my architect must have his elbows free to-morrow morning— Popinot has gone out without my permission," he cried, looking round and not seeing his cashier. "Ah, true, he does not sleep here any more, I forgot that. He is gone," thought César, "either to write down Monsieur Vauquelin's ideas, or else to hire the shop."

"We all know the cause of this household change," said Célestin, speaking in behalf of the two other clerks and Raguet, grouped behind him. "Is it allowable to congratulate monsieur upon an honor which reflects its light upon the whole establishment? Popinot has told us that monsieur —"

"Hey, hey! my children, it is all true. I have been decorated. I am about to assemble my friends, not only to celebrate the emancipation of our territory, but to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor. I may, possibly, have shown myself worthy of that signal and royal favor by my services on the Bench of commerce, and by fighting for the royal cause; which I defended — at your age — upon the steps of Saint-Roch on the 13th Vendémiaire, and I give you my word that Napoleon, called emperor, wounded me himself! wounded me in the thigh; and Madame Ragon nursed me. Take courage! recompense comes to every man. Behold, my sons! misfortunes are never wasted."

"They will never fight in the streets again," said Célestin.

"Let us hope so," said César, who thereupon went off into an harangue to the clerks, which he wound up by inviting them to the ball.

The vision of a ball inspired the three clerks, Raguet, and Virginie the cook with an ardor that gave them the strength of acrobats. They came and went up and down the stairs, carrying everything and breaking nothing. By two o'clock in the morning the removal was effected. César and his wife slept on the second floor. Popinot's bedroom became that of Célestin and

the second clerk. On the third floor the furniture was stored provisionally.

In the grasp of that magnetic ardor, produced by an influx of the nervous fluid, which lights a brazier in the midriff of ambitious men and lovers intent on high emprise, Popinot, so gentle and tranquil usually, pawed the earth like a thoroughbred before the race, when he came down into the shop after dinner.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Célestin.

"Oh, what a day! my dear fellow, what a day! I am set up in business, and Monsieur César is decorated."

"You are very lucky if the master helps you," said Célestin.

Popinot did not answer; he disappeared, driven by a furious wind, — the wind of success.

"Lucky!" said one of the clerks, who was sorting gloves by the dozen, to another who was comparing prices on the tickets. "Lucky! the master has found out that Popinot is making eyes at Mademoiselle Césarine, and, as the old fellow is pretty clever, he gets rid of Anselme; it would be difficult to refuse him point-blank, on account of his relations. Célestin thinks the trick is luck or generosity!"

VI.

Anselme Popinot went down the Rue Saint-Honoré and rushed along the Rue des Deux-Ecus to seize upon a young man whom his commercial *second-sight* pointed out to him as the principal instrument of his future fortune. Popinot the judge had once done a great service to the cleverest of all commercial travellers, to him whose triumphant loquacity and activity were to win him, in coming years, the title of The Illustrious. Devoted especially to the hat-trade and the *article-Paris*, this prince of travellers was called, at the time of which we write, purely and simply, Gaudissart. At the age of twenty-two he was already famous by the power of his commercial magnetism. In those days he was slim, with a joyous eye, expressive face, unwearied memory, and a glance that guessed the wants of every one; and he deserved to be, what in fact he became, the king of commercial travellers, the *Frenchman par excellence*. A few days earlier Popinot had met Gaudissart, who mentioned that he was on the point of departure; the hope of finding him still in Paris sent the lover flying into the Rue des Deux-Écus, where he learned that the traveller had engaged his place at the Messageries-Royales. To bid adieu to his beloved capital, Gaudissart had gone to see a new piece at the Vaudeville; Popinot resolved to

wait for him. Was it not drawing a cheque on fortune to intrust the launching of the oil of nuts to this incomparable steersman of mercantile inventions, already petted and courted by the richest firms? Popinot had reason to feel sure of Gaudissart. The commercial traveller, so knowing in the art of entangling that most wary of human beings, the little provincial trader, had himself become entangled in the first conspiracy attempted against the Bourbons after the Hundred Days. Gaudissart, to whom the open firmament of heaven was indispensable, found himself shut up in prison, under the weight of an accusation for a capital offence. Popinot the judge, who presided at the trial, released him on the ground that it was nothing worse than his imprudent folly which had mixed him up in the affair. A judge anxious to please the powers in office, or a rabid royalist, would have sent the luckless traveller to the scaffold. Gaudissart, who believed he owed his life to the judge, cherished the grief of being unable to make his savior any other return than that of sterile gratitude. As he could not thank a judge for doing justice, he went to the Ragons and declared himself liege-vassal forever to the house of Popinot.

While waiting about for Gaudissart, Anselme naturally went to look at the shop in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, and got the address of the owner, for the purpose of negotiating a lease. As he sauntered through the dusky labyrinth of the great market, thinking how to achieve a rapid success, he suddenly came, in the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, upon a rare chance, and one of good omen, with which he resolved to regale César on the

morrow. Soon after, while standing about the door of the Hôtel du Commerce, at the end of the Rue des Deux-Écus, about midnight, he heard, in the far distance of the Rue de Grenelle, a vaudeville chorus sung by Gaudissart, with a cane accompaniment significantly rapped upon the pavement.

"Monsieur," said Anselme, suddenly appearing from the doorway, "two words?"

"Eleven, if you like," said the commercial traveller, brandishing his loaded cane over the aggressor.

"I am Popinot," said poor Anselme.

"Enough!" cried Gaudissart, recognizing him. "What do you need? Money? — absent, on leave, but we can get it. My arm for a duel? — all is yours, from my head to my heels," and he sang, —

"Behold! behold!
A Frenchman true!"

"Come and talk with me for ten minutes; not in your room, — we might be overheard, — but on the Quai de l'Horloge; there's no one there at this hour," said Popinot. "It is about something important."

"Exciting, hey? Proceed."

In ten minutes Gaudissart, put in possession of Popinot's secret, saw its importance.

"Come forth! perfumers, hair-dressers, petty retailers!"

sang Gaudissart, mimicking Lafon in the rôle of the Cid. "I shall grab every shopkeeper in France and Navarre. — Oh, an idea! I was about to start; I remain; I shall take commissions from the Parisian perfumers."

"Why?"

"To strangle your rivals, simpleton! If I take their orders I can make their perfidious cosmetics drink oil, simply by talking and working for yours only. A first-rate traveller's trick! Ha! ha! we are the diplomatists of commerce. Famous! As for your prospectus, I'll take charge of that. I've got a friend — early childhood — Andoche Finot, son of the hat-maker in the Rue du Coq, the old buffer who launched me into travelling on hats. Andoche, who has a great deal of wit, — he got it out of all the heads tiled by his father, — he is in literature; he does the minor theatres in the "Courrier des Spectacles." His father, an old dog chock-full of reasons for not liking wit, won't believe in it; impossible to make him see that mind can be sold, sells itself in fact: he won't believe in anything but the three-sixes. Old Finot manages young Finot by famine. Andoche, a capable man, no fool, — I don't consort with fools, except commercially, — Andoche makes epigrams for the "Fidèle Berger," which pays; while the other papers, for which he works like a galley-slave, keep him down on his marrow-bones in the dust. Are not they jealous, those fellows? Just the same in the *article-Paris!* Finot wrote a superb comedy in one act for Mademoiselle Mars, most glorious of the glorious! — ah, there's a woman I love! — Well, in order to get it played he had to take it to the Gaité. Andoche understands prospectuses, he worms himself into the mercantile mind; and he's not proud, he'll concoct it for us gratis. Damn it! with a bowl of bunch and a few cakes we'll get it out of him; for, Popinot, no nonsense! I am to travel

on your commission without pay: your competitors shall pay; I'll diddle it out of them. Let us understand each other clearly. As for me, this triumph is an affair of honor. My reward is to be best man at your wedding! I shall go to Italy, Germany, England! I shall carry with me placards in all languages, paste them everywhere, in villages, on doors of churches, all the best spots I can find in provincial towns! The oil shall sparkle, scintillate, glisten on every head. Ha! your marriage shall not be a sham; we'll make it a pageant, colors flying! You shall have your Césarine, or my name shall not be ILLUSTRIOUS, — that is what Père Finot calls me for having got off his gray hats. In selling your oil I keep to my own sphere, the human head; hats and oil are well-known preservatives of the public hair."

Popinot returned to his aunt's house, where he was to sleep, in such a fever, caused by his visions of success, that the streets seemed to him to be running oil. He slept little, dreamed that his hair was madly growing, and saw two angels who unfolded, as they do in melodramas, a scroll on which was written "Oil Césarienne." He woke, recollected the dream, and vowed to give the oil of nuts that sacred name, accepting the sleeping fancy as a celestial mandate.

César and Popinot were at their work-shop in the Faubourg du Temple the next morning long before the arrival of the nuts. While waiting for Madame Madou's porters, Popinot triumphantly recounted his treaty of alliance with Gaudissart.

"Have we indeed the illustrious Gaudissart? Then are we millionaires!" cried the perfumer, extending his hand to his cashier with an air which Louis XIV. must have worn when he received the Maréchal de Villars on his return from Denain.

"We have something besides," said the happy clerk, producing from his pocket a bottle of a squat shape, like a pumpkin, and ribbed on the sides. "I have found ten thousand bottles like that, all made ready to hand, at four sous, and six months' credit."

"Anselme," said Birotteau, contemplating the wondrous shape of the flask, "yesterday [here his tone of voice became solemn] in the Tuileries, — yes, no later than yesterday, — you said to me, 'I will succeed.' To-day I — I say to you, 'You will succeed.' Four sous! six months! an unparalleled shape! Macassar trembles to its foundations! Was I not right to seize upon the only nuts in Paris? Where did you find these bottles?"

"I was waiting to speak to Gaudissart, and sauntering — "

"Just like me, when I found the Arab book," cried Birotteau.

"Coming down the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, I saw in a wholesale glass place, where they make blown glass and cases, — an immense place, — I caught sight of this flask; it blinded my eyes like a sudden light; a voice cried to me, 'Here's your chance!'"

"Born merchant! he shall have my daughter," muttered César.

"I went in; I saw thousands of these bottles packed in cases."

"You asked about them?"

"Do you think me such a ninny?" cried Anselme, in a grieved tone.

"Born merchant!" repeated Birotteau.

"I asked for glass cases for the little wax Jesus; and while I was bargaining about them I found fault with the shape of the bottles. From one thing to another, I trapped the man into admitting that Faille and Bouchot, who lately failed, were starting a new cosmetic and wanted a peculiar style of bottle; he was doubtful about them and asked for half the money down. Faille and Bouchot, expecting to succeed, paid the money; they failed while the bottles were making. The assignees, when called upon to pay the bill, arranged to leave him the bottles and the money in hand, as an indemnity for the manufacture of articles thought to be ridiculous in shape, and quite unsalable. They cost originally eight sous; he was glad to get rid of them for four; for, as he said, God knows how long he might have on his hands a shape for which there was no sale! 'Are you willing,' I said to him, 'to furnish ten thousand at four sous? If so, I may perhaps relieve you of them. I am a clerk at Monsieur Birotteau's.' I caught him, I led him, I mastered him, I worked him up, and he is all ours."

"Four sous!" said Birotteau. "Do you know that we could use oil at three francs, and make a profit of thirty sous, and give twenty sous discount to retailers?"

"Oil Césarienne!" cried Popinot.

"Oil Césarienne? — Ah, lover! would you flatter both father and daughter? Well, well, so be it; Oil

Césarienne! The Césars owned the whole world. They must have had fine hair."

"César was bald," said Popinot.

"Because he never used our oil. Three francs for the Oil Césarienne, while Macassar Oil costs double! Gaudissart to the fore! We shall make a hundred thousand francs this year, for we'll pour on every head that respects itself a dozen bottles a year, — eighteen francs; say eighteen thousand heads, — one hundred and eighty thousand francs. We are millionnaires!"

The nuts delivered, Raguet, the workmen, Popinot, and César shelled a sufficient quantity, and before four o'clock they had several pounds of oil. Popinot carried the product to show to Vauquelin, who made him a present of a recipe for mixing the essence of nuts with other and less costly oleaginous substances, and scenting it. Popinot went to work at once to take out a patent for the invention and all improvements thereon. The devoted Gaudissart lent him the money to pay the fees, for Popinot was ambitious to pay his share in the undertaking.

Prosperity brings with it an intoxication which inferior men are unable to resist. César's exaltation of spirit had a result not difficult to foresee. Grindot came, and presented a colored sketch of a charming interior view of the proposed appartement. Birotteau, seduced, agreed to everything; and soon the house, and the heart of Constance, began to quiver under the blows of pick and hammer. The house-painter, Monsieur Lourdois, a very rich contractor, who had promised that nothing should be wanting, talked of gilding the salon. On hearing that word Constance interposed.

"Monsieur Lourdois," she said, "you have an income of thirty thousand francs, you occupy your own house, and you can do what you like to it; but the rest of us —"

"Madame, commerce ought to shine and not permit itself to be kept in the shade by the aristocracy. Besides, Monsieur Birotteau is in the government; he is before the eyes of the world —"

"Yes, but he still keeps a shop," said Constance, in the hearing of the clerks and the five persons who were listening to her. "Neither he, nor I, nor his friends, nor his enemies will forget that."

Birotteau rose upon the points of his toes and fell back upon his heels several times, his hands crossed behind him.

"My wife is right," he said; "we should be modest in prosperity. Moreover, as long as a man is in business he should be careful of his expenses, limited in his luxury; the law itself imposes the obligation, — he must not allow himself "excessive expenditures." If the enlargement of my home and its decoration were to go beyond due limits, it would be wrong in me to permit it; you yourself would blame me, Lourdois. The neighborhood has its eye upon me; successful men incur jealousy, envy. Ah! you will soon know that, young man," he said to Grindot; "if we are calumniated, at least let us give no handle to the calumny."

"Neither calumny nor evil-speaking can touch you," said Lourdois; "your position is unassailable. But your business habits are so strong that you must argue over every enterprise; you are a deep one —"

"True, I have some experience in business. You

know, of course, why I make this enlargement? If I insist on punctuality in the completion of the work, it is — "

"No."

"Well, my wife and I are about to assemble our friends, as much to celebrate the emancipation of our territory as to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor — "

"What do you say?" said Lourdois, "have they given you the cross?"

"Yes; I may possibly have shown myself worthy of that signal royal favor by my services on the Bench of commerce, and by fighting for the Bourbons upon the steps of Saint-Roch, on the 13th Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon. Come to the ball, and bring your wife and daughter."

"Charmed with the honor you deign to pay me," said Lourdois (a liberal). "But you are a deep one, Papa Birotteau; you want to make sure that I shall not break my word, — that 's the reason you invite me. Well, I 'll employ my best workmen; we 'll build the fires of hell and dry the paint. I must find some desiccating process; it would never do to dance in a fog from the wet plaster. We will varnish to hide the smell."

Three days later the commercial circles of the quarter were in a flutter at the announcement of Birotteau's ball. Everybody could see for themselves the props and scaffoldings necessitated by the change of the staircase, the square wooden funnels down which the rubbish was thrown into the carts stationed in the street. The sight of men working by torchlight — for there were day workmen and night workmen — arrested

all the idlers and busybodies in the street; gossip, based on these preparations, proclaimed a sumptuous forthcoming event.

On Sunday, the day César had appointed to conclude the affair of the lands about the Madeleine, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, and uncle Pillerault arrived about four o'clock, just after vespers. In view of the demolition that was going on, so César said, he could only invite Charles Claparon, Crottat, and Roguin. The notary brought with him the "Journal des Débats" in which Monsieur de la Billardière had inserted the following article: —

"We learn that the deliverance of our territory will be fêted with enthusiasm throughout France. In Paris the members of the municipal body feel that the time has come to restore the capital to that accustomed splendor which under a becoming sense of propriety was laid aside during the foreign occupation. The mayors and deputy-mayors each propose to give a ball; this national movement will no doubt be followed, and the winter promises to be a brilliant one. Among the fêtes now preparing, the one most talked of is the ball of Monsieur Birotteau, lately named chevalier of the Legion of honor and well-known for his devotion to the royal cause. Monsieur Birotteau, wounded in the affair of Saint-Roch, on the 13th Vendémiaire, was one of the most respected judges in the department of commerce, and therefore has doubly merited this honor."

"How well they write nowadays," cried César. "They are talking about us in the papers," he said to Pillerault.

"Well, what of it?" answered his uncle, who had a special antipathy to the "Journal des Débats."

"That article may help to sell the Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm," whispered Madame César to Madame Ragon, not sharing the intoxication of her husband.

Madame Ragon, a tall woman, dry and wrinkled, with a pinched nose and thin lips, bore a spurious resemblance to a marquise of the old court. The circles round her eyes had spread to a wide circumference, like those of elderly women who have known sorrow. The severe and dignified, although affable, expression of her countenance inspired respect. She had, withal, a certain oddity about her, which excited notice, but never ridicule; and this was exhibited in her dress and habits. She wore mittens, and carried in all weathers a cane sunshade, like that used by Queen Marie-Antoinette at Trianon; her gown (the favorite color was pale-brown, the shade of dead leaves) fell from her hips in those inimitable folds the secret of which the dowagers of the olden time have carried away with them. She retained the black mantilla trimmed with black lace woven in large square meshes; her caps, old-fashioned in shape, had the quaint charm which we see in silhouettes relieved against a white background. She took snuff with exquisite nicety and with the gestures which young people of the present day who have had the happiness of seeing their grandmothers and great-aunts replacing their gold snuff-boxes solemnly on the tables beside them, and shaking off the grains which strayed upon their kerchiefs, will doubtless remember.

The Sieur Ragon was a little man, not over five feet high, with a face like a nut-cracker, in which could

be seen only two eyes, two sharp cheek-bones, a nose and a chin. Having no teeth he swallowed half his words, though his style of conversation was effluent, gallant, pretentious, and smiling, with the smile he formerly wore when he received beautiful great ladies at the door of his shop. Powder, well raked off, defined upon his cranium a nebulous half-circle, flanked by two pigeon-wings, divided by a little queue tied with a ribbon. He wore a bottle-blue coat, a white waistcoat, small-clothes and silk stockings, shoes with gold buckles, and black silk gloves. The most marked feature of his behavior was his habit of going through the street holding his hat in his hand. He looked like a messenger of the Chamber of Peers, or an usher of the king's bedchamber, or any of those persons placed near to some form of power from which they get a reflected light, though of little account themselves.

"Well, Birotteau," he said, with a magisterial air, "do you repent, my boy, for having listened to us in the old times? Did we ever doubt the gratitude of our beloved sovereigns?"

"You have been very happy, dear child," said Madame Ragon to Madame Birotteau.

"Yes, indeed," answered Constance, always under the spell of the cane parasol, the butterfly cap, the tight sleeves, and the great kerchief *à la Julie* which Madame Ragon wore.

"Césarine is charming. Come here, my love," said Madame Ragon, in her shrill voice and patronizing manner.

"Shall we do the business before dinner?" asked uncle Pillerault,

"We are waiting for Monsieur Claparon," said Roguin, "I left him dressing himself."

"Monsieur Roguin," said César, "I hope you told him that we should dine in a wretched little room on the *entresol*—"

"He thought it superb sixteen years ago," murmured Constance.

"— among workmen and rubbish."

"Bah! you will find him a good fellow, with no pretension," said Roguin.

"I have put Raguet on guard in the shop. We can't go through our own door; everything is pulled down."

"Why did you not bring your nephew?" said Pillerault to Madame Ragon.

"Shall we not see him?" asked Césarine.

"No, my love," said Madame Ragon; "Anselme, dear boy, is working himself to death. That bad-smelling Rue des Cinq-Diamants, without sun and without air, frightens me. The gutter is always blue or green or black. I am afraid he will die of it. But when a young man has something in his head—" and she looked at Césarine with a gesture which explained that the word head meant heart.

"Has he got his lease?" asked César.

"Yesterday, before a notary," replied Ragon. "He took the place for eighteen years, but they exacted six months' rent in advance."

"Well, Monsieur Ragon, are you satisfied with me?" said the perfumer. "I have given him the secret of a great discovery—"

"We know you by heart, César," said little Ragon,

taking César's hands and pressing them with religious friendship.

Roguin was not without anxiety as to Claparon's entrance on the scene; for his tone and manners were quite likely to alarm these virtuous and worthy people; he therefore thought it advisable to prepare their minds.

"You are going to see," he said to Pillerault and the two ladies, "a thorough original, who hides his methods under a fearfully bad style of manners; from a very inferior position he has raised himself up by intelligence. He will acquire better manners through his intercourse with bankers. You may see him on the boulevard, or in a café tippling, disorderly, betting at billiards, and think him a mere idler; but he is not; he is thinking and studying all the time to keep industry alive by new projects."

"I understand that," said Birotteau; "I got my great ideas when sauntering on the boulevard; did n't I, Mimi?"

"Claparon," resumed Roguin, "makes up by night-work the time lost in looking about him in the day-time, and watching the current of affairs. All men of great talent lead curious lives, inexplicable lives; well, in spite of his desultory ways he attains his object, as I can testify. In this instance he has managed to make the owners of these lands give way: they were unwilling, doubtful, timid; he fooled them all, tired them out, went to see them every day, — and here we are, virtually masters of the property."

At this moment a curious *broum! broum!* peculiar to tipplers of brandy and other liquors, announced the

arrival of the most fantastic personage of our story, and the arbiter in flesh and blood of the future destinies of César Birotteau. The perfumer rushed headlong to the little dark staircase, as much to tell Raguet to close the shop as to pour out his excuses to Claparon for receiving him in the dining-room.

"What of that? It's the very place to juggle a — I mean to settle a piece of business."

In spite of Roguin's clever precautions, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, people of old-fashioned middle-class breeding, the observer Pillerault, Césarine, and her mother were disagreeably impressed at first sight by this sham banker of high finance.

About twenty-eight years of age at the time of which we write, the late commercial traveller possessed not a hair on his head, and wore a wig curled in ringlets. This head-gear needed, by rights, a virgin freshness, a lacteal purity of complexion, and all the softer corresponding graces: as it was, however, it threw into ignoble relief a pimpled face, brownish-red in color, inflamed like that of the conductor of a diligence, and seamed with premature wrinkles, which betrayed in the puckers of their deep-cut lines a licentious life, whose misdeeds were still further evidenced by the badness of the man's teeth, and the black speckles which appeared here and there on his corrugated skin. Claparon had the air of a provincial comedian who knows all the rôles, and plays the clown with a wink; his cheeks, where the rouge never stuck, were jaded by excesses, his lips clammy, though his tongue was forever wagging, especially when drunk; his glances were immodest, and his gestures compromising. Such a face, flushed

with the jovial fumes of punch, was enough to turn grave business matters into a farce; so that the embryo banker had been forced to put himself through a long course of mimicry before he managed to acquire even the semblance of a manner that accorded with his fictitious importance.

Du Tillet assisted in dressing him for this occasion, like the manager of a theatre who is uneasy about the début of his principal actor; he feared lest the vulgar habits of this devil-may-care life should crop up to the surface of the newly-fledged banker. "Talk as little as you can," he said to him. "No banker ever gabbles; he acts, thinks, reflects, listens, weighs. To seem like a banker you must say nothing, or, at any rate, mere nothings. Check that ribald eye of yours, and look serious, even if you have to look stupid. If you talk politics, go for the government, but keep to generalities. For instance: 'The budget is heavy;' 'No compromise is possible between the parties;' 'The Liberals are dangerous;' 'The Bourbons must avoid a conflict;' 'Liberalism is the cloak of a coalition;' 'The Bourbons are inaugurating an era of prosperity: let us sustain them, even if we do not like them;' 'France has had enough of politics,' etc. Don't gorge yourself at every table where you dine; recollect you are to maintain the dignity of a millionaire. Don't shovel in your snuff like an old Invalide; toy with your snuff-box, glance often at your feet, and sometimes at the ceiling, before you answer; try to look sagacious, if you can. Above all, get rid of your vile habit of touching everything; in society a banker ought to seem tired of seeing and touching things. Hang it! you are supposed to be

passing wakeful nights; finance makes you brusque, so many elements must be brought together to launch an enterprise, — so much study! Remember to take gloomy views of business; it is heavy, dull, risky, unsettled. Now, don't go beyond that, and mind you specify nothing. Don't sing those songs of Béranger at table; and don't get fuddled. If you are drunk, your future is lost. Roguin will keep an eye on you. You are going now among moral people, virtuous people; and you are not to scare them with any of your pot-house principles."

This lecture produced upon the mind of Charles Claparon very much the effect that his new clothes produced upon his body. The jovial scapegrace, easy-going with all the world, and long used to a comfortable shabbiness, in which his body was no more shackled than his mind was shackled by language, was now encased in the new clothes his tailor had just sent home, rigid as a picket-stake, anxious about his motions as well as about his speech; drawing back his hand when it was imprudently thrust out to grasp a bottle, just as he stopped his tongue in the middle of a sentence. All this presented a laughable discrepancy to the keen observation of Pillerault. Claparon's red face, and his wig with its profligate ringlets, gave the lie to his apparel and pretended bearing, just as his thoughts clashed and jangled with his speech. But these worthy people ended by crediting such discordances to the preoccupation of his busy mind.

"He is so full of business," said Roguin.

"Business has given him little education," whispered Madame Ragon to Césarine.

Monsieur Roguin overheard her, and put a finger on his lips: —

"He is rich, clever, and extremely honorable," he said, stooping to Madame Ragon's ear.

"Something may be forgiven in consideration of such qualities," said Pillerault to Ragon.

"Let us read the deeds before dinner," said Roguin; "we are all alone."

Madame Ragon, Césarine, and Constance left the contracting parties to listen to the deeds read over to them by Alexandre Crottat. César signed, in favor of one of Roguin's clients, a mortgage bond for forty thousand francs, on his grounds and manufactories in the Faubourg du Temple; he turned over to Roguin Pillerault's cheque on the Bank of France, and gave, without receipt, bills for twenty thousand francs from his current funds, and notes for one hundred and forty thousand francs payable to the order of Claparon.

"I have no receipt to give you," said Claparon; "you deal, for your half of the property, with Monsieur Roguin, as I do for ours. The sellers will get their pay from him in cash; all that I engage to do is to see that you get the equivalent of the hundred and forty thousand francs paid to my order."

"That is equitable," said Pillerault.

"Well, gentlemen, let us call in the ladies; it is cold without them," said Claparon, glancing at Roguin, as if to ask whether that jest were too broad.

"Ladies! Ah! mademoiselle is doubtless yours," said Claparon, holding himself very straight and looking at Birotteau; "hey! you are not a bungler. None

of the roses you distil can be compared with her; and perhaps it is because you have distilled roses that —"

"Faith!" said Roguin interrupting him, "I am very hungry."

"Let us go to dinner," said Birotteau.

"We shall dine before a notary," said Claparon, catching himself up.

"You do a great deal of business?" said Pillerault, seating himself intentionally next to Claparon.

"Quantities; by the gross," answered the banker. "But it is all heavy, dull; there are risks, canals. Oh, canals! you have no idea how canals occupy us; it is easy to explain. Government needs canals. Canals are a want especially felt in the departments; they concern commerce, you know. 'Rivers,' said Pascal, 'are walking markets.' We must have markets. Markets depend on embankments, tremendous earth-works; earth-works employ the laboring-classes; hence loans, which find their way back, in the end, to the pockets of the poor. Voltaire said, 'Canaux, canards, canaille!' But the government has its own engineers; you can't get a finger in the matter unless you get on the right side of them; for the Chamber, — oh, monsieur, the Chamber does us all the harm in the world! It won't take in the political question hidden under the financial question. There's bad faith on one side or the other. Would you believe it? there's Keller in the Chamber: now François Keller is an orator, he attacks the government about the budget, about canals. Well, when he gets home to the bank, and we go to him with proposals, canals, and so forth, the sly dog is all

the other way: everything is right; we must arrange it with the government which he has just been impudently attacking. The interests of the orator and the interests of the banker clash; we are between two fires! Now, you understand how it is that business is risky; we have got to please everybody, — clerks, chambers, antechambers, ministers — "

"Ministers?" said Pillerault, determined to get to the bottom of this co-associate.

"Yes, monsieur, ministers."

"Well, then the newspapers are right?" said Pillerault.

"There 's my uncle talking politics," said Birotteau. "Monsieur Claparon has won his heart."

"Devilish rogues, the newspapers," said Claparon. "Monsieur, the newspapers do all the mischief. They are useful sometimes, but they keep me awake many a night. I wish they did n't. I have put my eyes out reading and ciphering."

"To go back to the ministers," said Pillerault, hoping for revelations.

"Ministers are a mere necessity of government. Ah! what am I eating? ambrosia?" said Claparon, breaking off. "This is a sauce you 'll never find except at a tradesman's table, for the pot-houses — "

Here the flowers in Madame Ragon's cap skipped like young rams. Claparon perceived the word was low, and tried to catch himself up.

"In bank circles," he said, "we call the best cafés, — Véry, and the Frères Provençaux, — pot-houses in jest. Well, neither those infamous pot-houses nor our most scientific cooks can make us a sauce like this;

mellifluous! Some give you clear water soured with lemon, and the rest drugs, chemicals."

Pillerault tried throughout the dinner to fathom this extraordinary being; finding only a void, he began to think him dangerous.

"All 's well," whispered Roguin to Claparon.

"I shall get out of these clothes to-night, at any rate," answered Claparon, who was choking.

"Monsieur," said César, addressing him, "we are compelled to dine in this little room because we are preparing, eighteen days hence, to assemble our friends, as much to celebrate the emancipation of our territory —"

"Right, monsieur; I myself am for the government. I belong, in opinion, to the *statu quo* of the great man who guides the destinies of the house of Austria, jolly dog! Hold fast that you may acquire; and, above all, acquire that you may hold. Those are my opinions, which I have the honor to share with Prince Metternich."

"— as to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor," continued César.

"Yes, I know. Who told me of that, — the Kellers, or Nucingen?"

Roguin, surprised at such tact, made an admiring gesture.

"No, no; it was in the Chamber."

"In the Chamber? was it Monsieur de la Billardière?" said Birotteau.

"Precisely."

"He is charming," whispered César to his uncle.

"He pours out phrases, phrases, phrases," said Pillerault, "enough to drown you."

"Possibly I showed myself worthy of this signal, royal favor, —" resumed Birotteau.

"By your labors in perfumery; the Bourbons know how to reward all merit. Ah! let us support those generous legitimate princes, to whom we are about to owe unheard-of prosperity. Believe me, the Restoration feels that it must run a tilt against the Empire; the Bourbons have conquests to make, the conquests of peace. You will see their conquests!"

"Monsieur will perhaps do us the honor to be present at our ball?" said Madame César.

"To pass an evening with you, Madame, I would sacrifice the making of millions."

"He certainly does chatter," said César to his uncle.

While the declining glory of perfumery was about to send forth its setting rays, a star was rising with feeble light upon the commercial horizon. Anselme Popinot was laying the corner-stone of his fortune in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants. This narrow little street, where loaded wagons can scarcely pass each other, runs from the Rue des Lombards at one end, to the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher at the other, entering the latter opposite to the Rue Quincampoix, that famous thoroughfare of old Paris where French history has so often been enacted. In spite of this disadvantage, the congregation of druggists in that neighborhood made Popinot's choice of the little street a good one. The house, which stands second from the Rue des Lombards, was so dark that except at certain seasons it was necessary to use lights in open day. The embryo merchant had taken possession, the preceding evening, of the dingy and disgusting premises.

His predecessor, who sold molasses and coarse sugars, had left the stains of his dirty business upon the walls, in the court, in the store-rooms. Imagine a large and spacious shop, with great iron-bound doors, painted a dragon-green, strengthened with long iron bars held on by nails whose heads looked like mushrooms, and covered with an iron trellis-work, which swelled out at the bottom after the fashion of the bakers'-shops in former days; the floor paved with large white stones, most of them broken, the walls yellow, and as bare as those of a guard-room. Next to the shop came the back-shop, and two other rooms lighted from the street, in which Popinot proposed to put his office, his books, and his own workroom. Above these rooms were three narrow little chambers pushed up against the party-wall, with an outlook into the court; here he intended to dwell. The three rooms were dilapidated, and had no view but that of the court, which was dark, irregular, and surrounded by high walls, to which perpetual dampness, even in dry weather, gave the look of being daubed with fresh plaster. Between the stones of this court was a filthy and stinking black substance, left by the sugars and the molasses that once occupied it. Only one of the bedrooms had a chimney, all the walls were without paper, and the floors were tiled with brick.

Since early morning Gaudissart and Popinot, helped by a journeyman whose services the commercial traveller had invoked, were busily employed in stretching a fifteen-sous paper on the walls of these horrible rooms, the workman pasting the lengths. A collegian's mattress on a bedstead of red wood, a shabby night-stand, an old-fashioned bureau, one table, two armchairs, and

six common chairs, the gift of Popinot's uncle the judge, made up the furniture. Gaudissart had decked the chimney-piece with a frame in which was a mirror much defaced, and bought at a bargain. Towards eight o'clock in the evening the two friends, seated before the fireplace where a fagot of wood was blazing, were about to attack the remains of their breakfast.

"Down with the cold mutton!" cried Gaudissart, suddenly, "it is not worthy of such a housewarming."

"But," said Popinot, showing his solitary coin of twenty francs, which he was keeping to pay for the prospectus, "I—"

"I—" cried Gaudissart, sticking a forty-franc piece in his own eye.

A knock resounded through the court, naturally empty and echoing of a Sunday, when the workpeople were away from it and the laboratories empty.

"Here comes the faithful slave of the Rue de la Poterie!" cried the illustrious Gaudissart.

Sure enough, a waiter entered, followed by two scullions bearing in three baskets a dinner, and six bottles of wine selected with discernment.

"How shall we ever eat it all up?" said Popinot.

"The man of letters!" cried Gaudissart, "don't for get him. Finot loves the pomps and the vanities; he is coming, the innocent boy, armed with a dishevelled prospectus—the word is pat, hein? Prospectuses are always thirsty. We must water the seed if we want flowers. Depart, slaves!" he added, with a gorgeous air, "there is gold for you."

He gave them ten sous with a gesture worthy of Napoleon, his idol.

"Thank you, Monsieur Gaudissart," said the scullions, better pleased with the jest than with the money.

"As for you, my son," he said to the waiter, who stayed to serve the dinner, "below is a porter's wife; she lives in a lair where she sometimes cooks, as in other days Nausicaa washed, for pure amusement. Find her, implore her goodness; interest her, young man, in the warmth of these dishes. Tell her she shall be blessed, and above all, respected, most respected, by Félix Gaudissart, son of Jean-François Gaudissart, grandson of all the Gaudissarts, vile proletaries of ancient birth, his forefathers. March! and mind that everything is hot, or I'll deal retributive justice by a rap on your knuckles."

Another knock sounded.

"Here comes the pungent Andoche!" shouted Gaudissart.

A stout, chubby-faced fellow of medium height, from head to foot the evident son of a hat-maker, with round features whose shrewdness was hidden under a restrained and subdued manner, suddenly appeared. His face, which was melancholy, like that of a man weary of poverty, lighted up hilariously when he caught sight of the table, and the bottles swathed in significant napkins. At Gaudissart's shout, his pale-blue eyes sparkled, his big head, hollowed like that of a Kalmuc Tartar, bobbed from right to left, and he bowed to Popinot with a queer manner, which meant neither servility nor respect, but was rather that of a man who feels he is not in his right place and will make no concessions. He was just beginning to find out that he possessed no literary talent whatever; he meant to stay in the pro-

fession, however, by living upon the brains of others, and getting astride the shoulders of those more able than himself, making his profit there instead of struggling any longer at his own ill-paid work. At the present moment he had drunk to the dregs the humiliation of applications and appeals which constantly failed, and he was now, like people in the higher walks of finance, about to change his tone and become insolent, advisedly. But he needed a small sum in hand on which to start, and Gaudissart gave him a share in the present affair of ushering into the world the oil of Popinot.

"You are to negotiate on his account with the newspapers. But don't play double; if you do I'll fight you to the death. Give him his money's worth."

Popinot gazed at "the author" with much uneasiness. People who are purely commercial look upon an author with mingled sentiments of fear, compassion, and curiosity. Though Popinot had been well brought up, the habits of his relations, their ideas, and the obfuscating effect of a shop and a counting-room, had lowered his intelligence by bending it to the use and wont of his calling, — a phenomenon which may often be seen if we observe the transformations which take place in a hundred comrades, when ten years supervene between the time when they leave college or a public school, to all intents and purposes alike, and the period when they meet again after contact with the world. Andoche accepted Popinot's perturbation as a compliment.

"Now then, before dinner, let's get to the bottom of the prospectus; then we can drink without an afterthought," said Gaudissart. "After dinner one reads askew; the tongue digests."

"Monsieur," said Popinot, "a prospectus is often a fortune."

"And for plebeians like myself," said Andoche, "fortune is nothing more than a prospectus."

"Ha, very good!" cried Gaudissart, "that rogue of a Finot has the wit of the forty Academicians."

"Of a hundred Academicians," said Popinot, bewildered by these ideas.

The impatient Gaudissart seized the manuscript and began to read in a loud voice, with much emphasis, "CEPHALIC OIL."

"I should prefer *Oil Césarienne*," said Popinot.

"My friend," said Gaudissart, "you don't know the provincials: there's a surgical operation called by that name, and they are such stupids that they 'll think your oil is meant to facilitate childbirth. To drag them back from that to hair is beyond even my powers of persuasion."

"Without wishing to defend my term," said the author, "I must ask you to observe that 'Cephalic Oil' means oil for the head, and sums up your ideas in one word."

"Well, let us see," said Popinot impatiently.

Here follows the prospectus; the same which the trade receives, by the thousand, to the present day (another *pièce justificative*): —

GOLD MEDAL. EXPOSITION OF 1819.

CEPHALIC OIL.

Patents for Invention and Improvements.

"No cosmetic can make the hair grow, and no chemical preparation can dye it without peril to the seat of intelligence. Science has recently made known the fact that hair

is a dead substance, and that no agent can prevent it from falling off or whitening. To prevent Baldness and Dandruff, it is necessary to protect the bulb from which the hair issues from all deteriorating atmospheric influences, and to maintain the temperature of the head at its right medium. CEPHALIC OIL, based upon principles laid down by the Academy of Sciences, produces this important result, sought by the ancients, — the Greeks, the Romans, and all Northern nations, — to whom the preservation of the hair was peculiarly precious. Certain scientific researches have demonstrated that nobles, formerly distinguished for the length of their hair, used no other remedy than this; their method of preparation, which had been lost in the lapse of ages, has been intelligently re-discovered by A. Popinot, the inventor of CEPHALIC OIL.

"To *preserve*, rather than provoke a useless and injurious stimulation of the integument which contains the bulbs, is the mission of CEPHALIC OIL. In short, this oil, which counteracts the exfoliation of pellicular atoms, which exhales a soothing perfume, and arrests, by means of the substances of which it is composed (among them more especially the oil of nuts), the action of the outer air upon the scalp, also prevents influenzas, colds in the head, and other painful cephalic affections, by maintaining the normal temperature of the cranium. Consequently, the bulbs, which contain the generating fluids, are neither chilled by cold nor parched by heat. The hair of the head, that magnificent product, priceless alike to man and woman, will be preserved even to advanced age, in all the brilliancy and lustre which bestow their charm upon the heads of infancy, by those who make use of CEPHALIC OIL.

"DIRECTIONS FOR USE are furnished with each bottle, and serve as a wrapper.

"METHOD OF USING CEPHALIC OIL. — It is quite useless to oil the hair; this is not only a vulgar and foolish prejudice, but an untidy habit, for the reason that all

cosmetics leave their trace. It suffices to wet a little sponge in the oil, and after parting the hair with the comb, to apply it at the roots in such a manner that the whole skin of the head may be enabled to imbibe it, after the scalp has received a preliminary cleansing with brush and comb.

"The oil is sold in bottles bearing the signature of the inventor, to prevent counterfeits. Price, THREE FRANCS. A. POPINOT, Rue des Cinq-Diamants, quartier des Lombards, Paris.

"*It is requested that all letters be prepaid.*

"N. B. The house of A. Popinot supplies all oils and essences appertaining to druggists: lavender, oil of almonds, sweet and bitter, orange oil, cocoa-nut oil, castor oil, and others."

"My dear friend," said the illustrious Gaudissart to Finot, "it is admirably written. Thunder and lightning! we are in the upper regions of science. We shirk nothing; we go straight to the point. That's useful literature; I congratulate you."

"A noble prospectus!" cried Popinot, enthusiastically.

"A prospectus which slays Macassar at the first word," continued Gaudissart, rising with a magisterial air to deliver the following speech, which he divided by gestures and pauses in his best parliamentary manner.

"No — hair — can be made — to grow! Hair cannot be dyed without — danger! Ha! ha! success is there. Modern science is in unison with the customs of the ancients. We can deal with young and old alike. We can say to the old man, 'Ha, monsieur! the ancients, the Greeks and Romans, knew a thing or two, and were not so stupid as some would have us believe;' and we can say to the young man, 'My

dear boy, here's another discovery due to progress and the lights of science. We advance; what may we not obtain from steam and telegraphy, and other things! This oil is based on the scientific treatise of Monsieur Vauquelin!' Suppose we print an extract from Monsieur Vauquelin's report to the Academy of Sciences, confirming our statement, hein? Famous! Come, Finot, sit down; attack the viands! Soak up the champagne! let us drink to the success of my young friend, here present!"

"I felt," said the author modestly, "that the epoch of flimsy and frivolous prospectuses had gone by; we are entering upon an era of science; we need an academical tone, — a tone of authority, which imposes upon the public."

"We'll boil that oil; my feet itch, and my tongue too. I've got commissions from all the rival hair people; none of them give more than thirty per cent discount; we must manage forty on every hundred remitted, and I'll answer for a hundred thousand bottles in six months. I'll attack apothecaries, grocers, perfumers! Give 'em forty per cent, and they'll bamboozle the public."

The three young fellows devoured their dinner like lions, and drank like lords to the future success of Cephalic Oil.

"The oil is getting into my head," said Finot.

Gaudissart poured out a series of jokes and puns upon hats and heads, and hair and hair-oil, etc. In the midst of Homeric laughter a knock resounded, and was heard, in spite of an uproar of toasts and reciprocal congratulations.

"It is my uncle!" cried Popinot. "He has actually come to see me."

"An uncle!" said Finot, "and we have n't got a glass!"

"The uncle of my friend Popinot is a judge," said Gaudissart to Finot, "and he is not to be hoaxed; he saved my life. Ha! when one gets to the pass where I was, under the scaffold — *Qou-ick*, and good-by to your hair," — imitating the fatal knife with voice and gesture. "One recollects gratefully the virtuous magistrate who saved the gutter where the champagne flows down. Recollect? — I'd recollect him dead-drunk! You don't know what it is, Finot, unless you have stood in need of Monsieur Popinot. Huzza! we ought to fire a salute — from six pounders, too!"

The virtuous magistrate was now asking for his nephew at the door. Recognizing his voice, Anselme went down, candlestick in hand, to light him up.

"I wish you good evening, gentlemen," said the judge.

The illustrious Gaudissart bowed profoundly. Finot examined the magistrate with a tipsy eye, and thought him a bit of a blockhead.

"You have not much luxury here," said the judge, gravely, looking round the room. "Well, my son, if we wish to be something great, we must begin by being nothing."

"What profound wisdom!" said Gaudissart to Finot.

"Text for an article," said the journalist.

"Ah! you here, monsieur?" said the judge, recognizing the commercial traveller; "and what are you doing now?"

"Monsieur, I am contributing to the best of my small ability to the success of your dear nephew. We have just been studying a prospectus for his oil; you see before you the author of that prospectus, which seems to us the finest essay in the literature of wigs." The judge looked at Finot. "Monsieur," said Gaudissart, "is Monsieur Andoche Finot, a young man distinguished in literature, who does high-class politics and the little theatres in the government newspapers, — I may say a statesman on the high-road to becoming an author."

Finot pulled Gaudissart by the coat-tails.

"Well, well, my sons," said the judge, to whom these words explained the aspect of the table, where there still remained the tokens of a very excusable feast. "Anselme," said the old gentleman to his nephew, "dress yourself, and come with me to Monsieur Birotteau's, where I have a visit to pay. You shall sign the deed of partnership, which I have carefully examined. As you mean to have the manufactory for your oil on the grounds in the Faubourg du Temple, I think you had better take a formal lease of them. Monsieur Birotteau might have others in partnership with him, and it is better to settle everything legally at once; then there can be no discussion. These walls seem to me very damp, my dear boy; take up the straw matting near your bed."

"Permit me, monsieur," said Gaudissart, with an ingratiating air, "to explain to you that we have just pasted up the paper ourselves, and that's the — reason why — the walls — are not — dry."

"Economy? quite right," said the judge.

"Look here," said Gaudissart in Finot's ear, "my friend Popinot is a virtuous young man; he is going with his uncle; let's you and I go and finish the evening with our cousins."

The journalist showed the empty lining of his pockets. Popinot saw the gesture, and slipped his twenty-franc piece into the palm of the author of the prospectus.

The judge had a coach at the end of the street, in which he carried off his nephew to the Birotteaus.

VII.

Pillerault, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, and Monsieur Roguin were playing at boston, and Césarine was embroidering a handkerchief, when the judge and Anselme arrived. Roguin, placed opposite to Madame Ragon, near whom Césarine was sitting, noticed the pleasure of the young girl when she saw Anselme enter, and he made Crottat a sign to observe that she turned as rosy as a pomegranate.

"This is to be a day of deeds, then?" said the perfumer, when the greetings were over and the judge told him the purpose of the visit.

César, Anselme, and the judge went up to the perfumer's temporary bedroom on the second floor to discuss the lease and the deed of partnership drawn up by the magistrate. A lease of eighteen years was agreed upon, so that it might run the same length of time as the lease of the shop in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, — an insignificant circumstance apparently, but one which did Birotteau good service in after days. When César and the judge returned to the *entresol*, the latter, surprised at the general upset of the household, and the presence of workmen on a Sunday in the house of a man so religious as Birotteau, asked the meaning of it, — a question which César had been eagerly expecting.

"Though you care very little for the world, monsieur," he said, "you will see no harm in celebrating the deliverance of our territory. That, however, is not all. We are about to assemble a few friends to commemorate my promotion to the order of the Legion of honor."

"Ah!" exclaimed the judge, who was not decorated.

"Possibly I showed myself worthy of that signal and royal favor by my services on the Bench — oh! of commerce, — and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps — "

"True," said the judge.

"— of Saint-Roch on the 13th Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon. May I not hope that you and Madame Popinot will do us the honor of being present?"

"Willingly," said the judge. "If my wife is well enough I will bring her."

"Xandrot," said Roguin to his clerk, as they left the house, "give up all thoughts of marrying Césarine; six weeks hence you will thank me for that advice."

"Why?" asked Crottat.

"My dear fellow, Birotteau is going to spend a hundred thousand francs on his ball, and he is involving his whole fortune, against my advice, in that speculation in lands. Six weeks hence he and his family won't have bread to eat. Marry Mademoiselle Lourdois, the daughter of the house-painter. She has three hundred thousand francs *dot*. I threw out that anchor to windward for you. If you will pay me a hundred thousand francs down for my practice, you may have it to-morrow."

The splendors of the approaching ball were announced

by the newspapers to all Europe, and were also made known to the world of commerce by rumors to which the preparations, carried on night and day, had given rise. Some said that César had hired three houses, and that he was gilding his salons; others that the supper would furnish dishes invented for the occasion. On one hand it was reported that no merchants would be invited, the fête being given to the members of the government; on the other hand, César was severely blamed for his ambition, and laughed at for his political pretensions: some people even went so far as to deny his wound. The ball gave rise to more than one intrigue in the second arrondissement. The friends of the family were easy in their minds, but the demands of mere acquaintances were enormous. Honors bring sycophants; and there was a goodly number of people whose invitations cost them more than one application. The Birotteaus were fairly frightened at the number of friends whom they did not know they had. These eager attentions alarmed Madame Birotteau, and day by day her face grew sadder as the great solemnity drew near.

In the first place, as she owned to César, she should never learn the right demeanor; next, she was terrified by the innumerable details of such a fête: where should she find the plate, the glass-ware, the refreshments, the china, the servants? Who would superintend it all? She entreated Birotteau to stand at the door of the appartement and let no one enter but invited guests; she had heard strange stories of people who came to bourgeois balls, claiming friends whose names they did not know. When, a week before the fateful day, Braschon, Grindot, Lourdois, and Chaffaroux, the builder, assured

César positively that the rooms would be ready for the famous Sunday of December the 17th, an amusing conference took place, in the evening after dinner, between César, his wife, and his daughter, for the purpose of making out the list of guests and addressing the invitations,— which a stationer had sent home that morning, printed on pink paper, in flowing English writing, and in the formula of commonplace and puerile civility.

"Now we must n't forget any body," said Birotteau.

"If we forget any one," said Constance, "they won't forget it. Madame Derville, who never called before, sailed down upon me in all her glory yesterday."

"She is very pretty," said Césarine. "I liked her."

"And yet before her marriage she was even less than I was," said Constance. "She did plain sewing in the Rue Montmartre; she made shirts for your father."

"Well, now let us begin the list," said Birotteau, "with the upper-crust people. Césarine, write down Monsieur le Duc and Madame la Duchesse de Lenoncourt —"

"Good heavens, César!" said Constance, "don't send a single invitation to people whom you only know as customers. Are you going to invite the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, who is more nearly related to your godmother, the late Marquise d'Uxelles, than the Duc de Lenoncourt? You surely don't mean to invite the two Messieurs de Vandenesse, Monsieur de Marsay, Monsieur de Ronquerolles, Monsieur d'Aiglemont, in short, all your customers? You are mad; your honors have turned your head!"

"Well, but there 's Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine and his family, hein? — the one that always went by

the name of GRAND-JACQUES, — and the YOUNG SCAMP, who was the Marquis de Montauran, and Monsieur de la Billardière, who was called the NANTAIS at 'The Queen of Roses' before the 13th Vendémiaire. In those days it was all hand-shaking, and 'Birotteau, take courage; let yourself be killed, like us, for the good cause.' Why, we are all comrades in conspiracy."

"Very good, put them down," said Constance. "If Monsieur de la Billardière comes he will want somebody to speak to."

"Césarine, write," said Birotteau. "*Primo*, Monsieur the prefect of the Seine; he'll come or he won't come, but any way he commands the municipality, — honor to whom honor is due. Monsieur de la Billardière and his son, the mayor. Put the number of the guests after their names. My colleague, Monsieur Granet, deputy-mayor, and his wife. She is very ugly, but never mind, we can't dispense with her. Monsieur Curel, the jeweller, colonel of the National Guard, his wife, and two daughters. Those are what I call the authorities. Now come the big wigs, — Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse de Fontaine, and their daughter, Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine."

"An insolent girl, who makes me leave the shop and speak to her at the door of the carriage, no matter what the weather is," said Madame César. "If she comes, it will only be to ridicule us."

"Then she'll be sure to come," said César, bent on getting everybody. "Go on, Césarine. Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse de Grandville, my landlord, — the longest head at the royal court, so Derville says. Ah ça! Monsieur de la Billardière is to

present me as a chevalier to-morrow to Monsieur le Comte de Lacépède himself, high chancellor of the Legion of honor. It is only proper that I should send him an invitation for the ball, and also to the dinner. Monsieur Vauquelin; put him down for ball and dinner both, Césarine. And (so as not to forget them) put down all the Chiffrevilles and the Protez; Monsieur and Madame Popinot, judge of the Lower Court of the Seine; Monsieur and Madame Thirion, gentleman-usher of the bedchamber to the king, friends of Ragon, and their daughter, who, they tell me, is to marry the son of Monsieur Camusot by his first wife."

"César, don't forget that little Horace Bianchon, the nephew of Monsieur Popinot, and cousin of Anselme," said Constance.

"Whew! Césarine has written a four after the name of Popinot. Monsieur and Madame Rabourdin, one of the under-secretaries in Monsieur de la Billardière's division; Monsieur Cochin, same division, his wife and son, sleeping-partners of Matifat, and Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Matifat themselves."

"The Matifats," said Césarine, "are fishing for invitations for Monsieur and Madame Colleville, and Monsieur and Madame Thuillier, friends of theirs."

"We will see about that," said César. "Put down my broker, Monsieur and Madame Jules Desmarets."

"She will be the loveliest woman in the room," said Césarine. "I like her — oh! better than any one else."

"Derville and his wife."

"Put down Monsieur and Madame Coquelin, the successors to my uncle Pillerault," said Constance. "They are so sure of an invitation that the poor little

woman has ordered my dressmaker to make her a superb ball-dress, a skirt of white satin, and a tulle robe with succory flowers embroidered all over it. A little more and she would have ordered a court-dress of gold brocade. If you leave them out we shall make bitter enemies."

"Put them down, Césarine; all honor to commerce, for we belong to it! Monsieur and Madame Roguin."

"Mamma, Madame Roguin will wear her diamond fillet and all her other diamonds, and her dress trimmed with Mechlin."

"Monsieur and Madame Lebas," said César; "also Monsieur le président of the Court of Commerce, — I forgot him among the authorities, — his wife, and two daughters; Monsieur and Madame Lourdois and their daughter; Monsieur Claparon, banker; Monsieur du Tillet; Monsieur Grindot; Monsieur Molineux; Pillerault and his landlord; Monsieur and Madame Camusot, the rich silk-merchants, and all their children, the one at the École Polytechnique, and the lawyer; he is to be made a judge because of his marriage to Mademoiselle Thirion."

"A provincial judge," remarked Constance.

"Monsieur Cardot, father-in-law of Camusot, and all the Cardot children. Bless me, and the Guillaumes, Rue du Colombièr, the father-in-law of Lebas — old people, but they'll sit in a corner; Alexandre Crottat; Célestin — "

"Papa, don't forget Monsieur Andoche Finot and Monsieur Gaudissart, two young men who are very useful to Monsieur Anselme."

"Gaudissart? he was once in the hands of justice. But never mind, he is going to travel for our oil and starts in a few days; put him down. As to the Sieur Andoche Finot, what is he to us?"

"Monsieur Anselme says he will be a great man; he has a mind like Voltaire."

"An author? all atheists."

"Let's put him down, papa; we want more dancers. Besides, he wrote the beautiful prospectus for the oil."

"He believes in my oil?" said César, "then put him down, dear child."

"I have put down all my protégés," said Césarine.

"Put Monsieur Mitral, my bailiff; Monsieur Haudry, our doctor, as a matter of form, — he won't come."

"Yes, he will, for his game of cards."

"Now, César, I do hope you mean to invite the Abbé Loraux to the dinner," said Constance.

"I have already written to him," said César.

"Oh! and don't forget the sister-in-law of Monsieur Lebas, Madame Augustine Sommervieux," said Césarine. "Poor little woman, she is so delicate; she is dying of grief, so Monsieur Lebas says."

"That's what it is to marry artists!" cried her father. "Look! there's your mother asleep," he whispered. "La! la! a very good night to you, Madame César — Now, then," he added, "about your mother's ball-dress?"

"Yes, papa, it will be all ready. Mamma thinks she will wear her china-crape like mine. The dressmaker is sure there is no need of trying it on."

"How many people have you got down," said César aloud, seeing that Constance opened her eyes.

"One hundred and nine, with the clerks."

"Where shall we ever put them all?" said Madame Birotteau. "But, anyhow, after that Sunday," she added naïvely, "there will come a Monday."

Nothing can be done simply and naturally by people who are stepping from one social level to another. Not a soul — not Madame Birotteau, nor César himself — was allowed to put foot into the new appartement on the first floor. César had promised Raguet, the shop-boy, a new suit of clothes for the day of the ball, if he mounted guard faithfully and let no one enter. Birotteau, like the Emperor Napoleon at Compiègne, when the château was re-decorated for his marriage with Maria Louisa of Austria, was determined to see nothing piecemeal; he wished to enjoy the surprise of seeing it as a whole. Thus the two antagonists met once more, all unknown to themselves, not on the field of battle, but on the peaceful ground of bourgeois vanity. It was arranged that Monsieur Grindot was to take César by the hand and show him the appartement when finished, — just as a guide shows a gallery to a sight-seer. Every member of the family had provided his, or her, private "surprise." Césarine, dear child, had spent all her little hoard, a hundred louis, on buying books for her father. Monsieur Grindot confided to her one morning that there were two bookcases in César's room, which enclosed an alcove, — an architectural surprise to her father. Césarine flung all her girlish savings upon the counter of a bookseller's shop, and obtained in return, Bossuet, Racine, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Molière, Buffon,

Fénelon, Delille, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, La Fontaine, Corneille, Pascal, La Harpe, — in short, the whole array of matter-of-course libraries to be found everywhere, and which assuredly her father would never read. A terrible bill for binding was in the background. The celebrated and dilatory binder, Thouvenin, had promised to deliver the volumes at twelve o'clock on the morning of the 16th. Césarine confided her anxiety to her uncle Pillerault, and he had promised to pay the bill. The "surprise" of César to his wife was the gown of cherry-colored velvet, trimmed with lace, of which he spoke to his accomplice, Césarine. The "surprise" of Madame Birotteau to the new chevalier was a pair of gold shoe-buckles, and a diamond pin. For the whole family there was the surprise of the new appartement, and, a fortnight later, the still greater surprise of the bills when they came in.

César carefully weighed the question as to which invitations should be given in person, and which should be sent by Raguet. He ordered a coach and took his wife — much disfigured by a bonnet with feathers, and his last gift, a shawl which she had coveted for fifteen years — on a round of civilities. In their best array, these worthy people paid twenty-two visits in the course of one morning.

César excused his wife from the labor and difficulty of preparing at home the various viands demanded by the splendor of the entertainment. A diplomatic treaty was arranged between the famous Chevet and the perfumer. Chevet furnished superb silver plate (which brought him an income equal to that of land); he supplied the dinner, the wines, and the waiters, under the orders of

a major-domo of dignified aspect, who was responsible for the proper management of everything. Chevet exacted that the kitchen, and the dining-room on the *entresol*, should be given up to him as headquarters; a dinner for twenty people was to be served at six o'clock, a superb supper at one in the morning. Birotteau arranged with the café Foy for ices in the shape of fruits, to be served in pretty saucers, with gilt spoons, on silver trays. Tanrade, another illustrious purveyor, furnished the refreshments.

"Don't be worried," said César to his wife, observing her uneasiness on the day before the great event, "Chevet, Tanrade, and the café Foy will occupy the *entresol*, Virginie will take charge of the second floor, the shop will be closed; all we shall have to do is to enshrine ourselves on the first floor."

At two o'clock, on the 16th, the mayor, Monsieur de la Billardière, came to take César to the Chancellerie of the Legion of honor, where he was to be received by Monsieur le Comte de Lacépède, and about a dozen chevaliers of the order. Tears were in his eyes when he met the mayor; Constance had just given him the "surprise" of the gold buckles and diamond pin.

"It is very sweet to be so loved," he said, getting into the coach in presence of the assembled clerks, and Césarine, and Constance. They, one and all, gazed at César, attired in black silk knee-breeches, silk stockings, and the new bottle-blue coat, on which was about to gleam the ribbon that, according to Molineux, was dyed in blood. When César came home to dinner, he was pale with joy; he looked at his cross in all the mirrors, for in the first moments of exultation he was

not satisfied with the ribbon, — he wore the cross, and was glorious without false shame.

"My wife," he said, "Monsieur the high chancellor is a charming man. On a hint from La Billardière he accepted my invitation. He is coming with Monsieur Vauquelin. Monsieur de Lacépède is a great man, — yes, as great as Monsieur Vauquelin; he has continued the work of Buffon in forty volumes; he is an author, peer of France! Don't forget to address him as, Your Excellence, or, Monsieur le comte."

"Do eat something," said his wife. "Your father is worse than a child," added Constance to Césarine.

"How well it looks in your button-hole," said Césarine. "When we walk out together, won't they present arms?"

"Yes, wherever there are sentries they will present arms."

Just at this moment Grindot was coming downstairs with Braschon. It had been arranged that after dinner, monsieur, madame, and mademoiselle were to enjoy a first sight of the new appartement; Braschon's foreman was now nailing up the last brackets, and three men were lighting the rooms.

"It takes a hundred and twenty wax-candles," said Braschon.

"A bill of two hundred francs at Trudon's," said Madame César, whose murmurs were checked by a glance from the chevalier Birotteau.

"Your ball will be magnificent, Monsieur le chevalier," said Braschon.

Birotteau whispered to himself, "Flatterers already! The Abbé Loraux urged me not to fall into that net,

but to keep myself humble. I shall try to remember my origin."

César did not perceive the meaning of the rich upholsterer's speech. Braschon made a dozen useless attempts to get invitations for himself, his wife, daughter, mother-in-law, and aunt. He called the perfumer Monsieur le chevalier to the door-way, and then he departed his enemy.

The rehearsal began. César, his wife, and Césarine went out by the shop-door and re-entered the house from the street. The entrance had been remodelled in the grand style, with double doors, divided into square panels, in the centre of which were architectural ornaments in cast-iron, painted. This style of door, since become common in Paris, was then a novelty. At the further end of the vestibule the staircase went up in two straight flights, and between them was the space which had given César some uneasiness, and which was now converted into a species of box, where it was possible to seat an old woman. The vestibule, paved in black and white marble, with its walls painted to resemble marble, was lighted by an antique lamp with four jets. The architect had combined richness with simplicity. A narrow red carpet relieved the whiteness of the stairs, which were polished with pumice-stone. The first landing gave an entrance to the *entresol;* the doors to each appartement were of the same character as the street-door, but of finer work by a cabinet-maker.

The family reached the first floor, and entered an ante-chamber in excellent taste, spacious, parquetted, and simply decorated. Next came a salon, with three

windows on the street, in white and red, with cornices of an elegant design which had nothing gaudy about them. On a chimney-piece of white marble supported by columns were a number of mantel ornaments chosen with taste; they suggested nothing to ridicule, and were in keeping with the other details. A soft harmony prevailed throughout the room, a harmony which artists alone know how to attain by carrying uniformity of decoration into the minutest particulars, — an art of which the bourgeois mind is ignorant, though it is much taken with its results. A glass chandelier, with twenty-four wax-candles, brought out the color of the red silk draperies; the polished floor had an enticing look, which tempted Césarine to dance.

"How charming!" she said; "and yet there is nothing to seize the eye."

"Exactly, mademoiselle," said the architect; "the charm comes from the harmony which reigns between the wainscots, walls, cornices, and the decorations; I have gilded nothing, the colors are sober, and not extravagant in tone."

"It is a science," said Césarine.

A boudoir in green and white led into César's study.

"Here I have put a bed," said Grindot, opening the doors of an alcove cleverly hidden between the two bookcases. "If you or madame should chance to be ill, each can have your own room."

"But this bookcase full of books, all bound! Oh! my wife, my wife!" cried César.

"No; that is Césarine's surprise."

"Pardon the feelings of a father," said César to the architect, as he kissed his daughter.

"Oh! of course, of course, monsieur," said Grindot; "you are in your own home."

Brown was the prevailing color in the study, relieved here and there with green, for a thread of harmony led through all the rooms and allied them with one another. Thus the color which was the leading tone of one room became the relieving tint of another. The engraving of Hero and Leander shone on one of the panels of César's study.

"Ah! *thou* wilt pay for all this," said Birotteau, looking gayly at it.

"That beautiful engraving is given to you by Monsieur Anselme," said Césarine.

(Anselme, too, had allowed himself a "surprise.")

"Poor boy! he has done just as I did for Monsieur Vauquelin."

The bedroom of Madame Birotteau came next. The architect had there displayed a magnificence well calculated to please the worthy people whom he was anxious to snare; he had really kept his word and *studied* this decoration. The room was hung in blue silk, with white ornaments; the furniture was in white cassimere touched with blue. On the chimney-piece, of white marble, stood a clock representing Venus crouching, on a fine block of marble; a moquette carpet, of Turkish design, harmonized this room with that of Césarine, which opened out of it, and was coquettishly hung with Persian chintz. A piano, a pretty wardrobe with a mirror door, a chaste little bed with simple curtains, and all the little trifles that young girls like, completed the arrangements of the room. The dining-room was behind the bedroom of César and his wife, and was entered

from the staircase; it was treated in the style called Louis XIV., with a clock in buhl, buffets of the same, inlaid with brass and tortoise-shell; the walls were hung with purple stuff, fastened down by gilt nails. The happiness of these three persons is not to be described, more especially when, re-entering her room, Madame Birotteau found upon her bed (where Virginie had just carried it, on tiptoe) the robe of cherry-colored velvet, with lace trimmings, which was her husband's "surprise."

"Monsieur, this appartement will win you great distinction," said Constance to Grindot. "We shall receive a hundred and more persons to-morrow evening, and you will win praises from everybody."

"I shall recommend you," said César. "You will meet the very *heads* of commerce, and you will be better known through that one evening than if you had built a hundred houses."

Constance, much moved, thought no longer of costs, nor of blaming her husband; and for the following reason: That morning, when he brought the engraving of Hero and Leander, Anselme Popinot, whom Constance credited with much intelligence and practical ability, had assured her of the inevitable success of Cephalic Oil, for which he was working night and day with a fury that was almost unprecedented. The lover promised that no matter what was the round sum of Birotteau's extravagance, it should be covered in six months by César's share in the profits of the oil. After fearing and trembling for nineteen years it was so sweet to give herself up to one day of unalloyed happiness, that Constance promised her daughter not to poison her husband's pleasure by any doubts or dis-

approval, but to share his happiness heartily. When therefore, about eleven o'clock, Grindot left them, she threw herself into her husband's arms and said to him with tears of joy, "César! ah, I am beside myself! You have made me very happy!"

"Provided it lasts, you mean?" said César, smiling.

"It will last; I have no more fears," said Madame Birotteau.

"That's right," said the perfumer; "you appreciate me at last."

People who are sufficiently large-minded to perceive their own innate weakness will admit that an orphan girl who eighteen years earlier was saleswoman at the Petit-Matelot, Île Saint-Louis, and a poor peasant lad coming from Touraine to Paris with hob-nailed shoes and a cudgel in his hand, might well be flattered and happy in giving such a fête for such praiseworthy reasons.

"Bless my heart!" cried César. "I'd give a hundred francs if some one would only come in now and pay us a visit."

"Here is Monsieur l'Abbé Loraux," said Virginie.

The abbé entered. He was at that time vicar of Saint-Sulpice. The power of the soul was never better manifested than in this saintly priest, whose intercourse with others left upon the minds of all an indelible impression. His grim face, so plain as to check confidence, had grown sublime through the exercise of Catholic virtues; upon it shone, as it were by anticipation, the celestial glories. Sincerity and candor, infused into his very blood, gave harmony to his unsightly features, and the fires of charity blended the discordant

lines by a phenomenon, the exact counterpart of that which in Claparon had debased and brutalized the human being. Faith, Hope, and Charity, the three noblest virtues of humanity, shed their charm among the abbé's wrinkles ; his speech was gentle, slow, and penetrating. His dress was that of the priests of Paris, and he allowed himself to wear a brown frock-coat. No ambition had ever crept into that pure heart, which the angels would some day carry to God in all its pristine innocence. It required the gentle firmness of the daughter of Louis XVI. to induce him to accept a benefice in Paris, humble as it was. As he now entered the room he glanced with an uneasy eye at the magnificence before him, smiled at the three delighted people, and shook his gray head.

" My children," he said, " my part in life is not to share in gayeties, but to visit the afflicted. I came to thank Monsieur César for his invitation, and to congratulate you. I shall come to only one fête here, — the marriage of this dear child."

After a short visit the abbé went away without seeing the various apartments, which the perfumer and his wife dared not show him. This solemn apparition threw a few drops of cold water into the boiling delight of César's heart. Each of the party slept amid their new luxury, taking possession of the good things and the pretty things they had severally wished for. Césarine undressed her mother before a toilet-table of white marble with a long mirror. César had given himself a few superfluities, and longed to make use of them at once: and they all went to sleep thinking of the joys of the morrow.

On that morrow Césarine and her mother, having been to Mass, and having read their vespers, dressed about four o'clock in the afternoon, after resigning the *entresol* to the secular arm of Chevet and his people. No attire ever suited Madame César better than this cherry-colored velvet dress with lace trimmings, and short sleeves made with jockeys: her beautiful arms, still fresh and youthful, her bosom, sparklingly white, her throat and shoulders of a lovely shape, were all heightened in effect by the rich material and the resplendent color. The naïve delight which every woman feels when she sees herself in the plenitude of her power gave an inexpressible sweetness to the Grecian profile of this charming woman, whose beauty had all the delicacy of a cameo. Césarine, dressed in white crape, wore a wreath of white roses, a rose at her waist, and a scarf chastely covering her shoulders and bust: Popinot was beside himself.

"These people crush us," said Madame Roguin to her husband as they went through the appartement.

The notary's wife was furious at appearing less beautiful than Madame César; for every woman knows how to judge the superiority or the inferiority of a rival.

"Bah!" whispered Roguin to his wife, "it won't last long; you will soon bespatter her when you meet her a-foot in the streets, ruined."

Vauquelin showed perfect tact; he came with Monsieur de Lacépède, his colleague of the Institute, who had called to fetch him in a carriage. On beholding the resplendent mistress of the fête they both launched into scientific compliments.

"Ah, madame, you possess a secret of which science is ignorant," said the chemist, "the recipe for remaining young and beautiful."

"You are, as I may say, partly at home here, Monsieur l'académicien," said Birotteau. "Yes, Monsieur le comte," he added, turning to the high chancellor of the Legion of honor, "I owe my fortune to Monsieur Vauquelin. I have the honor to present to your lordship Monsieur le président of the Court of Commerce. This is Monsieur le Comte de Lacépède, peer of France," he said to Joseph Lebas, who accompanied the president.

The guests were punctual. The dinner, like all commercial dinners, was extremely gay, full of good humor, and enlivened by the rough jests which always raise a laugh. The excellence of the dishes and the goodness of the wines were fully appreciated. It was half-past nine o'clock when the company returned to the salons to take their coffee. A few hackney-coaches had already brought the first impatient dancers. An hour later the rooms were full, and the ball took the character of a rout. Monsieur de Lacépède and Monsieur Vauquelin went away, to the great grief of César, who followed them to the staircase, vainly entreating them to remain. He succeeded, however, in keeping Monsieur Popinot the judge, and Monsieur de la Billardière. With the exception of three women who severally represented the aristocracy, finance, and government circles, — namely, Mademoiselle de Fontaine, Madame Jules, and Madame Rabourdin, whose beauty, dress, and manners were sharply defined in this assemblage, — all the other women wore heavy, over-loaded dresses, and offered to the eye that anomalous air of richness which gives to

the bourgeois masses their vulgar aspect, made cruelly apparent on this occasion by the airy grace of the three other women.

The bourgeoisie of the Rue Saint-Denis displayed itself majestically in the plenitude of its native powers of jocose silliness. It was a fair specimen of that middle class which dresses its children like lancers or national guards, buys the "Victoires et Conquêtes," the "Soldat-laboureur," admires the "Convoi du Pauvre," delights in mounting guard, goes on Sunday to its own country-house, is anxious to acquire the distinguished air, and dreams of municipal honors, — that middle class which is jealous of all and of every one, and yet is good, obliging, devoted, feeling, compassionate, ready to subscribe for the children of General Foy, or for the Greeks, whose piracies it knows nothing about, or the Exiles until none remained; duped through its virtues and scouted for its defects by a social class that is not worthy of it, for it has a heart precisely because it is ignorant of social conventions, — that virtuous middle-class which brings up ingenuous daughters to an honorable toil, giving them sterling qualities which diminish as soon as they are brought in contact with the superior world of social life; girls without mind, among whom the worthy Chrysale would have chosen his wife, — in short, a middle-class admirably represented by the Matifats, druggists in the Rue des Lombards, whose firm had supplied "The Queen of Roses" for more than sixty years.

Madame Matifat, wishing to give herself a dignified air, danced in a turban and a heavy robe of scarlet shot with gold threads, — a toilet which harmonized well

with a self-important manner, a Roman nose, and the splendors of a crimson complexion. Monsieur Matifat, superb at a review of the National Guard, where his protuberant paunch could be distinguished at fifty paces, and upon which glittered a gold chain and a bunch of trinkets, was under the yoke of this Catherine II. of commerce. Short and fat, harnessed with spectacles and a shirt-collar worn above his ears, he was chiefly distinguished for his bass voice and the richness of his vocabulary. He never said Corneille, but "the sublime Corneille;" Racine was "the gentle Racine;" Voltaire, "Oh! Voltaire, second in everything, with more wit than genius, but nevertheless a man of genius;" Rousseau, "a gloomy mind, a man full of pride, who hanged himself." He related in his prosy way vulgar anecdotes of Piron, a poet who passes for a prodigy among the bourgeoisie. Matifat, a passionate lover of the stage, had a slight leaning to obscenity. It was even said that, in imitation of Cadot and the rich Camusot, he kept a mistress. Sometimes Madame Matifat, seeing him about to relate some questionable anecdote, would hasten to interrupt him by screaming out: "Take care what you are saying, old man!" She called him habitually her "old man." This voluminous queen of drugs caused Mademoiselle de Fontaine to lose her aristocratic countenance, for the impertinent girl could not help laughing as she overheard her saying to her husband: "Don't fling yourself upon the ices, old man, it is bad style."

It is more difficult to explain the nature of the difference between the great world and the bourgeoisie than it is for the bourgeoisie to obliterate it. These

women, embarrassed by their fine clothes and very conscious of them, displayed a naïve pleasure which proved that a ball was a rarity in their busy lives; while the three women, who each represented a sphere in the great world, were then exactly what they would be on the morrow. They had no appearance of having dressed purposely for the ball, they paid no heed to the splendor of their jewels, nor to the effect which they themselves produced; all had been arranged when they stood before their mirrors and put the last touches to their toilets. Their faces showed no excitement or excessive interest, and they danced with the grace and ease which unknown genius has given to certain statues of antiquity.

The others, on the contrary, stamped with the mark of toil, retained their vulgar attitudes, and amused themselves too heartily; their eyes were full of inconsiderate curiosity; their voices ranged above the low murmur which gives inimitable piquancy to the conversations of a ball-room; above all, they had none of that composed impertinence which contains the germs of epigram, nor the tranquil attitude which characterizes those who are accustomed to maintain empire over themselves. Thus Madame Rabourdin, Madame Jules, and Mademoiselle de Fontaine, who had expected much amusement from the ball of their perfumer, were detached from the background of the bourgeoisie about them by their soft and easy grace, by the exquisite taste of their dress and bearing, — just as three leading singers at an opera stand out in relief from the stolid array of the supernumeraries. They were watched with jealous, wondering eyes. Madame Roguin, Constance, and Césarine formed, as it were, a link which united the

three types of feminine aristocracy to the commercial figures about them.

There came, as there does at all balls, a moment when the animation of the scene, the torrents of light, the gayety, the music, the excitement of dancing brought on a species of intoxication which puts out of sight these gradations in the *crescendo* of the *tutti*. The ball was beginning to be noisy, and Mademoiselle de Fontaine made a movement to retire; but when she looked about for the arm of her venerable Vendéen, Birotteau, his wife, and daughter made haste to prevent such a desertion of the aristocracy.

"There is a perfume of good taste about this appartement which really amazes me," remarked that impertinent young woman to the perfumer. "I congratulate you."

Birotteau was so intoxicated by compliments that he did not comprehend her meaning; but his wife colored, and was at a loss how to reply.

"This is a national fête which does you honor," said Camusot.

"I have seldom seen such a ball," said Monsieur de la Billardière, to whom an official falsehood was of no consequence.

Birotteau took all these compliments seriously.

"What an enchanting scene! What a fine orchestra! Will you often give us a ball?" said Madame Lebas.

"What a charming appartement! Is this your own taste?" said Madame Desmarets.

Birotteau ventured on a fib, and allowed her to suppose that he had designed it.

Césarine, who was asked, of course, for all the dances, understood very well Anselme's delicacy in that matter.

"If I thought only of my own wishes," he had whispered as they left the dinner-table, "I should beg you to grant me the favor of a quadrille; but my happiness would be too costly to our mutual self-love."

Césarine, who thought all men walked ungracefully if they stood straight on their legs, was resolved to open the ball with Popinot. Popinot, emboldened by his aunt, who told him to dare all, ventured to tell his love to the charming girl, during the pauses of the quadrille, using, however, the roundabout terms of a timid lover.

"My fortune depends on you, mademoiselle."

"And how?"

"There is but one hope that can enable me to make it."

"Then hope."

"Do you know what you have said to me in those two words?" murmured Popinot.

"Hope for fortune," said Césarine, with an arch smile.

"Gaudissart! Gaudissart!" exclaimed Anselme, when the quadrille was over, pressing the arm of his friend with herculean force. "Succeed, or I'll blow my brains out! Success, and I shall marry Césarine! she has told me so: see how lovely she is!"

"Yes, she is prettily tricked out," said Gaudissart, "and rich. We'll fry her in oil."

The good understanding between Mademoiselle Lourdois and Alexandre Crottat, the promised successor to

Roguin, was noticed by Madame Birotteau, who could not give up without a pang the hope of seeing her daughter the wife of a notary of Paris.

Uncle Pillerault, who had exchanged bows with little Molineux, seated himself in an armchair near the bookshelves. He looked at the card-players, listened to the conversations, and went to the doorway every now and then to watch the oscillating bouquet of flowers formed by the circling heads of the dancers in the *moulinet*. The expression of his face was that of a true philosopher. The men were dreadful, — all, that is, except du Tillet, who had acquired the manners of the great world, little La Billardière, a budding fashionable, Monsieur Desmarets, and the official personages. But among all the faces, more or less comical, from which the assemblage took its character, there was one that was particularly washed-out, like a five-franc piece of the Republic, and whose owner's apparel rendered him a curiosity. We guess at once the little tyrant of the Cour Batave, arrayed with linen yellowed by lying by in a cupboard, and exhibiting to the eye a shirt-frill of lace that had been an heirloom, fastened with a bluish cameo set as a pin; he wore short black-silk breeches which revealed the skinny legs on which he boldly stood. César showed him, triumphantly, the four rooms constructed by the architect out of the first floors of the two houses.

"Hey! hey! Well, it is your affair, Monsieur Birotteau," said Molineux. "My first floor thus improved will be worth more than three thousand francs to me."

Birotteau answered with a jest; but he was pricked as if with a pin at the tone in which the little old man had pronounced the words.

"I shall soon have my first floor back again; the man will ruin himself." Such was the real meaning of the speech which Molineux delivered like the scratch of a claw.

The sallow face and vindictive eye of the old man struck du Tillet, whose attention had first been attracted by a watch-chain from which hung a pound of jingling gew-gaws, and by a green coat with a collar whimsically cocked up, which gave the old man the semblance of a rattlesnake. The banker approached the usurer to find out how and why he had thus bedizened himself.

"There, monsieur," said Molineux, planting one foot in the boudoir, "I stand on the property of Monsieur le Comte de Grandville; but here," he added, showing the other, "I stand upon my own. I am the owner of this house."

Molineux was so ready to lend himself to any one who would listen to him, and so delighted by du Tillet's attentive manner, that he gave a sketch of his life, related his habits and customs, told the improper conduct of the Sieur Gendrin, and, finally, explained all his arrangements with the perfumer, without which, he said, the ball could not have been given.

"Ah! Monsieur César let you settle the lease?" said du Tillet. "It is contrary to his habits."

"Oh! I asked it of him. I am good to my tenants."

"If Père Birotteau fails," thought du Tillet, "this little imp would make an excellent assignee. His sharpness is invaluable; when he is alone he must amuse himself by catching flies, like Domitian."

Du Tillet went to the card-table, where Claparon was

already stationed, under orders; Ferdinand thought that under shelter of a game of *bouillotte* his counterfeit banker might escape notice. Their demeanor to each other was that of two strangers, and the most suspicious man could have detected nothing that betrayed an understanding between them. Gaudissart, who knew the career of Claparon, dared not approach him after receiving a solemnly frigid glance from the promoted commercial traveller which warned him that the upstart banker was not to be recognized by any former comrade. The ball, like a brilliant rocket, was extinguished by five o'clock in the morning. At that hour only some forty hackney-coaches remained, out of the hundred or more which had crowded the Rue Saint-Honoré. Within, they were dancing the *boulangère*, which has since been dethroned by the cotillon and the English galop. Du Tillet, Roguin, Cardot junior, the Comte de Grandville, and Jules Desmarets were playing at *bouillotte*. Du Tillet won three thousand francs. The day began to dawn, the wax lights paled, the players joined the dancers for a last quadrille. In such houses the final scenes of a ball never pass off without some impropriety. The dignified personages have departed; the intoxication of dancing, the heat of the atmosphere, the spirits concealed in the most innocent drinks, have mellowed the angularities of the old women, who good-naturedly join in the last quadrille and lend themselves to the excitement of the moment; the men are heated, their hair, lately curled, straggles down their faces, and gives them a grotesque expression which excites laughter; the young women grow volatile, and a few flowers drop from their garlands. The bourgeois Momus appears,

followed by his reveilers. Laughs ring loudly; all present surrender to the amusement of the moment, knowing that on the morrow toil will resume its sway. Matifat danced with a woman's bonnet on his head; Célestin called the figures of the interminable country dance, and some of the women beat their hands together excitedly at the words of command.

"How they do amuse themselves!" cried the happy Birotteau.

"I hope they won't break anything," said Constance to her uncle.

"You have given the most magnificent ball I have ever seen, and I have seen many," said du Tillet, bowing to his old master.

Among the eight symphonies of Beethoven there is a theme, glorious as a poem, which dominates the finale of the symphony in C minor. When, after slow preparations by the sublime magician, so well understood by Habeneck, the enthusiastic leader of an orchestra raises the rich veil with a motion of his hand and calls forth the transcendent theme towards which the powers of music have all converged, poets whose hearts have throbbed at those sounds will understand how the ball of César Birotteau produced upon his simple being the same effect that this fecund harmony wrought in theirs, — an effect to which the symphony in C minor owes its supremacy over its glorious sisters. A radiant fairy springs forward, lifting high her wand. We hear the rustle of the violet silken curtains which the angels raise. Sculptured golden doors, like those of the baptistery at Florence, turn on their diamond hinges. The eye is lost in splendid vistas: it sees a long perspective

of rare palaces where beings of a loftier nature glide. The incense of all prosperities sends up its smoke, the altar of all joy flames, the perfumed air circulates! Beings with divine smiles, robed in white tunics bordered with blue, flit lightly before the eyes and show us visions of supernatural beauty, shapes of an incomparable delicacy. The Loves hover in the air and waft the flames of their torches! We feel ourselves beloved; we are happy as we breathe a joy we understand not, as we bathe in the waves of a harmony that flows for all, and pours out to all the ambrosia that each desires. We are held in the grasp of our secret hopes which are realized, for an instant, as we listen. When he has led us through the skies, the great magician, with a deep mysterious transition of the basses, flings us back into the marshes of cold reality, only to draw us forth once more when, thirsting for his divine melodies, our souls cry out, "Again! Again!" The psychical history of that rare moment in the glorious finale of the C minor symphony is also that of the emotions excited by this fête in the souls of César and of Constance. The flute of Collinet sounded the last notes of their commercial symphony.

Weary, but happy, the Birotteaus fell asleep in the early morning amid echoes of the fête,— which for building, repairs, furnishing, suppers, toilets, and the library (repaid to Césarine), cost not less, though César was little aware of it, than sixty thousand francs. Such was the price of the fatal red ribbon fastened by the king to the buttonhole of an honest perfumer. If misfortunes were to overtake César Birotteau, this mad extravagance would be sufficient to arraign him before the

criminal courts. A merchant is amenable to the laws if, in the event of bankruptcy, he is shown to have been guilty of "excessive expenditure." It is perhaps more dreadful to go before the lesser courts charged with folly or blundering mistakes, than before the Court of Assizes for an enormous fraud. In the eyes of some people, it is better to be criminal than a fool.

PART II.

CÉSAR GRAPPLING WITH MISFORTUNE.

I.

Eight days after his ball, the last dying flash of a prosperity of eighteen years now about to be extinguished, César Birotteau watched the passers-by from the windows of his shop, thinking over the expansion of his affairs, and beginning to find them burdensome. Until then all had been simple in his life; he manufactured and sold, or bought to sell again. To-day the land speculation, his share in the house of A. Popinot and Company, the repayment of the hundred and sixty thousand francs thrown upon the market, which necessitated either a traffic in promissory notes (of which his wife would disapprove), or else some unheard-of success in Cephalic Oil, all fretted the poor man by the multiplicity of ideas which they involved; he felt he had more irons in the fire than he could lay hold of. How would Anselme guide the helm? Birotteau treated Popinot as a professor of rhetoric treats a pupil, — he distrusted his methods, and regretted that he was not at his elbow. The kick he had given Popinot to make him hold his tongue at Vauquelin's explains the uneasiness which the young merchant inspired in his mind.

Birotteau took good care that neither his wife nor his daughter nor the clerks should suspect his anxiety; but he was in truth like an humble boatman on the Seine whom the government has suddenly put in command of a frigate. Troubled thoughts filled his mind, never very capable of reflection, as if with a fog; he stood still, as it were, and peered about to see his way. At this moment a figure appeared in the street for which he felt a violent antipathy; it was that of his new landlord, little Molineux. Every one has dreamed dreams filled with the events of a lifetime, in which there appears and reappears some wayward being, commissioned to play the mischief and be the villain of the piece. To Birotteau's fancy Molineux seemed delegated by chance to fill some such part in his life. His weird face had grinned diabolically at the ball, and he had looked at its magnificence with an evil eye. Catching sight of him again at this moment, César was all the more reminded of the impression the little skinflint (a word of his vocabulary) had made upon him, because Molineux excited fresh repugnance by reappearing in the midst of his anxious revery.

"Monsieur," said the little man, in his atrociously hypocritical voice, "we settled our business so hastily that you forgot to guarantee the signatures on the little private deed."

Birotteau took the lease to repair the mistake. The architect came in at this moment, and bowed to the perfumer, looking about him with a diplomatic air.

"Monsieur," he whispered to César presently, "you can easily understand that the first steps in a profession are difficult; you said you were satisfied with me, and

it would oblige me very much if you would pay me my commission."

Birotteau, who had stripped himself of ready money when he put his current cash into Roguin's hands two weeks earlier, called to Célestin to make out an order for two thousand francs at ninety days' sight, and to write the form of a receipt.

"I am very glad you took part of your neighbor's rental on yourself," said Molineux in a sly, half-sneering tone. "My porter came to tell me just now that the sheriff has affixed the seals to the Sieur Cayron's appartement; he has disappeared."

"I hope I'm not juggled out of five thousand francs," thought Birotteau.

"Cayron always seemed to do a good business," said Lourdois, who just then came in to bring his bill.

"A merchant is never safe from commercial reverses until he has retired from business," said little Molineux, folding up his document with fussy precision.

The architect watched the queer old man with the enjoyment all artists find in getting hold of a caricature which confirms their theories about the bourgeoisie.

"When we have got our head under an umbrella we generally think it is protected from the rain," he said.

Molineux noticed the mustachios and little chin-tuft of the artist much more than he did his face, and he despised that individual fully as much as Grindot despised him. He waited to give him a parting scratch as he went out. By dint of living so long with his cats Molineux had acquired, in his manners as well as in his eyes, something unmistakably feline.

Just at this moment Ragon and Pillerault came in.

"We have been talking of the land affair with the judge," said Ragon in César's ear; "he says that in a speculation of that kind we must have a warranty from the sellers, and record the deeds, and pay in cash, before we are really owners and co-partners."

"Ah! you are talking of the lands about the Madeleine," said Lourdois; "there is a good deal said about them: there will be houses to build."

The painter who had come intending to have his bill settled, suddenly thought it more to his interest not to press Birotteau.

"I brought my bill because it was the end of the year," he whispered to César; "but there 's no hurry."

"What is the matter, César?" said Pillerault, noticing the amazement of his nephew, who, having glanced at the bill, made no reply to either Ragon or Lourdois.

"Oh, a trifle. I took notes to the amount of five thousand francs from my neighbor, a dealer in umbrellas, and he has failed. If he has given me bad securities I shall be caught, like a fool."

"And yet I have warned you many times," cried Ragon; "a drowning man will catch at his father's leg to save himself, and drown him too. I have seen so many failures! People are not exactly scoundrels when the disaster begins, but they soon come to be, out of sheer necessity."

"That 's true," said Pillerault.

"If I ever get into the Chamber of Deputies, and ever have any influence in the government," said Birotteau, rising on his toes and dropping back on his heels, —

"What would you do?" said Lourdois, "for you've a long head."

Molineux, interested in any discussion about law, lingered in the shop; and as the attention of a few persons is apt to make others attentive, Pillerault and Ragon listened as gravely as the three strangers, though they perfectly well knew César's opinions.

"I would have," said the perfumer, "a court of irremovable judges, with a magistracy to attend to the application and execution of the laws. After the examination of a case, during which the judge should fulfil the functions of agent, assignee, and commissioner, the merchant should be declared *insolvent with rights of reinstatement*, or else *bankrupt*. If the former, he should be required to pay in full; he should be left in control of his own property and that of his wife; all his belongings and his inherited property should belong to his creditors, and he should administer his affairs in their interests under supervision; he should still carry on his business, signing always 'So-and-so, insolvent,' until the whole debt is paid off. If bankrupt, he should be condemned, as formerly, to the pillory on the Place de la Bourse, and exposed for two hours, wearing a green cap. His property and that of his wife, and all his rights of every kind should be handed over to his creditors, and he himself banished from the kingdom."

"Business would be more secure," said Lourdois; "people would think twice before launching into speculations."

"The existing laws are not enforced," cried César, lashing himself up. "Out of every hundred merchants there are more than fifty who never realize

seventy-five per cent of the whole value of their business, or who sell their merchandise at twenty-five per cent below the invoice price; and that is the destruction of commerce."

"Monsieur is very right," said Molineux; "the law leaves a great deal too much latitude. There should either be total relinquishment of everything, or infamy."

"Damn it!" said César, "at the rate things are going now, a merchant will soon be a licensed thief. With his mere signature he can dip into anybody's money-drawer."

"You have no mercy, Monsieur Birotteau," said Lourdois.

"He is quite right," said old Ragon.

"All insolvents are suspicious characters," said César, exasperated by his little loss, which sounded in his ears like the first cry of the view-halloo in the ears of the game.

At this moment the late major-domo brought in Chevet's account, followed by a clerk sent by Félix, a waiter from the café Foy, and Collinet's clarionet, each with a bill.

"Rabelais' quarter of an hour," said Ragon, smiling.

"It was a fine ball," said Lourdois.

"I am busy," said César to the messengers; who all left the bills and went away.

"Monsieur Grindot," said Lourdois, observing that the architect was folding up Birotteau's cheque, "will you certify my account? You need only add it up; the prices were all agreed to by you on Monsieur Birotteau's behalf."

Pillerault looked at Lourdois and Grindot.

"Prices agreed upon between the architect and contractor?" he said in a low voice to his nephew,—"they have robbed you."

Grindot left the shop, and Molineux followed him with a mysterious air.

"Monsieur," he said, "you listened to me, but you did not understand me, — I wish you the protection of an umbrella."

The architect was frightened. The more illegal a man's gains the more he clings to them: the human heart is so made. Grindot had really studied the appartement lovingly; he had put all his art and all his time into it; he had given ten thousand francs worth of labor, and he felt that in so doing he had been the dupe of his vanity: the contractors therefore had little trouble in seducing him. The irresistible argument and threat, fully understood, of injuring him professionally by calumniating his work were, however, less powerful than a remark made by Lourdois about the lands near the Madeleine. Birotteau did not expect to build a single house upon them; he was speculating only in the value of the land; but architects and contractors are to each other very much what authors and actors are, — mutually dependent. Grindot, ordered by Birotteau to stipulate the costs, went for the interests of the builders against the bourgeoisie; and the result was that three large contractors — Lourdois, Chaffaroux, and Thorein the carpenter — proclaimed him "one of those good fellows it is a pleasure to work for." Grindot guessed that the contractor's bills, out of which he was to have a share, would be paid, like his commission, in notes; and little Molineux had just filled his mind with doubts

as to their payment. The architect was about to become pitiless, — after the manner of artists, who are most intolerant of men in their dealings with the middle classes.

By the end of December bills to the amount of sixty thousand francs had been sent in. Félix, the café Foy, Tanrade, and all the little creditors who ought to be paid in ready money, had asked for payment three times. Failure to pay such trifles as these do more harm in business than a real misfortune, — they foretell it: known losses are definite, but a panic defies all reckoning. Birotteau saw his coffers empty, and terror seized him: such a thing had never happened throughout his whole commercial life. Like all persons who have never struggled long with poverty, and who are by nature feeble, this circumstance, so common among the greater number of the petty Parisian tradesmen, disturbed for a moment César's brain. He ordered Célestin to send round the bills of his customers and ask for payment. Before doing so, the head clerk made him repeat the unheard-of order. The clients, — a fine term applied by retail shopkeepers to their customers, and used by César in spite of his wife, who however ended by saying, "Call them what you like, provided they pay!" — his clients, then, were rich people, through whom he had never lost money, who paid when they pleased, and among whom César often had a floating amount of fifty or sixty thousand francs due to him. The second clerk went through the books and copied off the largest sums. César dreaded his wife: that she might not see his depression under this simoom of misfortune, he prepared to go out.

"Good morning, monsieur," said Grindot, entering with the lively manner artists put on when they speak of business, and wish to pretend they know nothing about it; "I cannot get your paper cashed, and I am obliged to ask you to give me the amount in ready money. I am truly unhappy in making this request, but I don't wish to go to the usurers. I have not hawked your signature about; I know enough of business to feel sure it would injure you. It is really in your own interest that I —"

"Monsieur," said Birotteau, horrified, "speak lower if you please; you surprise me strangely."

Lourdois entered.

"Lourdois," said Birotteau, smiling, "would you believe —"

The poor man stopped short; he was about to ask the painter to take the note given to Grindot, ridiculing the architect with the good nature of a merchant sure of his own standing; but he saw a cloud upon Lourdois' brow, and he shuddered at his own imprudence. The innocent jest would have been the death of his suspected credit. In such a case a prosperous merchant takes back his note, and does not offer it elsewhere. Birotteau felt his head swim, as though he had looked down the sides of a precipice into a measureless abyss.

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Lourdois, drawing him to the back of the shop, "my account has been examined, audited, and certified; I must ask you to have the money ready for me to-morrow. I marry my daughter to little Crottat; he wants money, for notaries will not take paper; besides, I never give promissory notes"

"Send to me on the day after to-morrow," said Birotteau proudly, counting on the payment of his own bills. "And you too, Monsieur," he said to the architect.

"Why not pay at once?" said Grindot.

"I have my workmen in the faubourg to pay," said Birotteau, who knew not how to lie.

He took his hat once more intending to follow them out, but the mason, Thorein, and Chaffaroux stopped him as he was closing the door.

"Monsieur," said Chaffaroux, "we are in great need of money."

"Well, I have not the mines of Peru," said César, walking quickly away from them. "There is something beneath all this," he said to himself. "That cursed ball! All the world thinks I am worth millions. Yet Lourdois had a look that was not natural; there 's a snake in the grass somewhere."

He walked along the Rue Saint-Honoré, in no special direction, and feeling much discomposed. At the corner of a street he ran against Alexandre Crottat, just as a ram, or a mathematician absorbed in the solution of a problem, might have knocked against another of his kind.

"Ah, monsieur," said the future notary, "one word! Has Roguin given your four hundred thousand francs to Monsieur Claparon?"

"The business was settled in your presence. Monsieur Claparon gave me no receipt; my acceptances were to be — negotiated. Roguin was to give him — my two hundred and forty thousand francs. He was told that he was to pay for the property definitely.

Monsieur Popinot the judge said — The receipt! — but — why do you ask the question?"

"Why ask the question? To know if your two hundred and forty thousand francs are still with Roguin. Roguin was so long connected with you, that perhaps out of decent feeling he may have paid them over to Claparon, and you will escape! But, no! what a fool I am! He has carried off Claparon's money as well! Happily, Claparon had only paid over, to my care, one hundred thousand francs. I gave them to Roguin just as I would give you my purse, and I have no receipt for them. The owners of the land have not received one penny; they have just been talking to me. The money you thought you raised upon your property in the Faubourg du Temple had no existence for you, or for the borrower; Roguin has squandered it, together with your hundred thousand francs, which he used up long ago, — and your last hundred thousand as well, for I just remember drawing them from the bank."

The pupils of César's eyes dilated so enormously that he saw only red flames.

"Your hundred thousand francs in his hands, my hundred thousand francs for his practice, a hundred thousand from Claparon, — there 's three hundred thousand francs purloined, not to speak of other thefts which will be discovered," exclaimed the young notary. "Madame Roguin is not to be counted on. Du Tillet has had a narrow escape. Roguin tormented him for a month to get him into that land speculation, but happily all his funds were tied up in an affair with Nucingen. Roguin has written an atrocious letter to his wife; I have read it. He has been making free with his clients' money for

years ; and why? for a mistress, — la belle Hollandaise. He left her two weeks ago. The squandering hussy had n't a farthing left; they sold her furniture, — she had signed promissory notes. To escape arrest, she took refuge in a house in the Palais-Royal, where she was assassinated last night by a captain in the army. God has quickly punished her; she has wasted Roguin's whole fortune and much more. There are some women to whom nothing is sacred: think of squandering the trust-moneys of a notary! Madame Roguin won't have a penny, except by claiming her rights of dower; the scoundrel's whole property is encumbered to its full value. I bought the practice for three hundred thousand francs, — I, who thought I was getting a good thing! — and paid a hundred thousand down. I have no receipt; the creditors will think I am an accomplice if I say a word about that hundred thousand francs, and when a man is starting in life he must be careful of his reputation. There will hardly be thirty per cent saved for the creditors. At my age, to get such a set-back! A man fifty-nine years of age to keep a mistress! the old villain! It is only two weeks since he told me not to marry Césarine; he said you would soon be without bread, — the monster! "

Alexandre might have talked on indefinitely, for Birotteau stood still, petrified. Every phrase was a calamity, like the blows of a bludgeon. He heard the death-bells tolling in his ears, — just as his eyes had seen, at the first word, the flames of his fortune. Alexandre Crottat, who thought the worthy perfumer a strong and able man, was alarmed at his paleness and rigidity. He was not aware that Roguin had carried off César's whole

property. The thought of immediate suicide passed through the brain of the victim, deeply religious as he was. In such a case suicide is only a way to escape a thousand deaths; it seems logical to take it. Alexandre Crottat gave him his arm, and tried to make him walk on, but it was impossible: his legs gave way under him as if he were drunk.

"What is the matter?" said Crottat. "Dear Monsieur César, take courage! it is not the death of a man. Besides, you will get back your forty thousand francs. The lender had n't the money ready, you never received it, — that is sufficient to set aside the agreement."

"My ball — my cross — two hundred thousand francs in paper on the market, — no money in hand! The Ragons, Pillerault, — and my wife, who saw true — "

A rain of confused words, revealing a weight of crushing thoughts and unutterable suffering, poured from his lips, like hail lashing the flowers in the garden of "The Queen of Roses."

"I wish they would cut off my head," he said at last; "its weight troubles me, it is good for nothing."

"Poor Père Birotteau," said Alexandre, "are you in danger?"

"Danger!"

"Well, take courage; make an effort."

"Effort!"

"Du Tillet was your clerk; he has a good head; he will help you."

"Du Tillet!"

"Come, try to walk."

"My God! I cannot go home as I am," said Birotteau. "You who are my friend, if there are friends, —

you in whom I took an interest, who have dined at my house, — take me somewhere in a carriage, for my wife's sake. Xandrot, go with me!"

The young notary compassionately put the inert mechanism which bore the name of César into a street coach, not without great difficulty.

"Xandrot," said the perfumer, in a voice choked with tears, — for the tears were now falling from his eyes, and loosening the iron band which bound his brow, — "stop at my shop; go in and speak to Célestin for me. My friend, tell him it is a matter of life or death, that on no consideration must he or any one talk about Roguin's flight. Tell Césarine to come down to me, and beg her not to say a word to her mother. We must beware of our best friends, of Pillerault, Ragon, everybody."

The change in Birotteau's voice startled Crottat, who began to understand the importance of the warning; he fulfilled the instructions of the poor man, whom Célestin and Césarine were horrified to find pale and half insensible in a corner of the carriage.

"Keep the secret," he said.

"Ah!" said Xandrot to himself, "he is coming to. I thought him lost."

From thence they went, at César's request, to a judge of the commercial courts. The conference between Crottat and the magistrate lasted long, and the president of the chamber of notaries was summoned. César was carried about from place to place, like a bale of goods; he never moved, and said nothing. Towards seven in the evening Alexandre Crottat took him home. The thought of appearing before Constance braced his

nerves. The young notary had the charity to go before, and warn Madame Birotteau that her husband had had a rush of blood to the head.

"His ideas are rather cloudy," he said, with a gesture implying disturbance of the brain. "Perhaps he should be bled, or leeches applied."

"No wonder," said Constance, far from dreaming of a disaster; "he did not take his precautionary medicine at the beginning of the winter, and for the last two months he has been working like a galley slave, — just as if his fortune were not made."

The wife and daughter entreated César to go to bed, and they sent for his old friend Monsieur Haudry. The old man was a physician of the school of Molière, a great practitioner and in favor of the old-fashioned formulas, who dosed his patients neither more nor less than a quack, consulting physician though he was. He came, studied the expression of César's face, and observing symptoms of cerebral congestion, ordered an immediate application of mustard plasters to the soles of his feet.

"What can have caused it?" said Constance.

"The damp weather," said the doctor, to whom Césarine had given a hint.

It often becomes a physician's duty to utter deliberately some silly falsehood, to save honor or life, to those who are about a sick-bed. The old doctor had seen much in his day, and he caught the meaning of half a word. Césarine followed him to the staircase, and asked for directions in managing the case.

"Quiet and silence; when the head is clear we will try tonics."

Madame César passed two days at the bedside of her husband, who seemed to her at times delirious. He lay in her beautiful blue room, and as he looked at the curtains, the furniture, and all the costly magnificence about him, he said things that were wholly incomprehensible to her.

"He must be out of his mind," she whispered to Césarine, as César rose up in bed and recited clauses of the commercial Code in a solemn voice.

"'If the expenditure is judged excessive!' Away with those curtains!"

At the end of three terrible days, during which his reason was in danger, the strong constitution of the Tourangean peasant triumphed; his head grew clear. Monsieur Haudry ordered stimulants and generous diet, and before long, after an occasional cup of coffee, César was on his feet again. Constance, wearied out, took her husband's place in bed.

"Poor woman!" said César, looking at her as she slept.

"Come, papa, take courage! you are so superior a man that you will triumph in the end. This trouble won't last; Monsieur Anselme will help you."

Césarine said these vague words in the tender tones which give courage to a stricken heart, just as the songs of a mother soothe the weary child tormented with pain as it cuts its teeth.

"Yes, my child, I shall struggle on; but say not a word to any one, — not to Popinot who loves us, nor to your uncle Pillerault. I shall first write to my brother; he is canon and vicar of the cathedral. He spends nothing, and I have no doubt he has means. If

he saves only three thousand francs a year, that would give him at the end of twenty years one hundred thousand francs. In the provinces the priests lay up money."

Césarine hastened to bring her father a little table with writing-things upon it, — among them the surplus of the invitations printed on pink paper.

"Burn all that!" cried her father. "The devil alone could have prompted me to give that ball. If I fail, I shall seem to have been a swindler. Stop!" he added, "words are of no avail." And he wrote the following letter: —

MY DEAR BROTHER, — I find myself in so severe a commercial crisis that I must ask you to send me all the money you can dispose of, even if you have to borrow some for the purpose.

Ever yours, CÉSAR.

Your niece, Césarine, who is watching me as I write, while my poor wife sleeps, sends you her tender remembrances.

This postscript was added at Césarine's urgent request; she then took the letter and gave it to Raguet.

"Father," she said, returning, "here is Monsieur Lebas, who wants to speak to you.

"Monsieur Lebas!" cried César, frightened, as though his disaster had made him a criminal, — "a judge!"

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau, I take too great an interest in you," said the stout draper, entering the room, "we have known each other too long, — for we were both elected judges at the same time, — not to tell you that a man named Bidault, called Gigonnet, a

usurer, has notes of yours turned over to his order, and marked 'not guaranteed,' by the house of Claparon. Those words are not only an affront, but they are the death of your credit."

"Monsieur Claparon wishes to speak to you," said Célestin, entering; "may I tell him to come up?"

"Now we shall learn the meaning of this insult," said Lebas.

"Monsieur," said César to Claparon, as he entered, "this is Monsieur Lebas, a judge of the commercial courts, and my friend —"

"Ah! monsieur is Monsieur Lebas?" interrupted Claparon. "Delighted with the opportunity, Monsieur Lebas of the commercial courts; there are so many Lebas, you know, of one kind or another —"

"He has seen," said Birotteau, cutting the gabbler short, "the notes which I gave you, and which I understood from you would not be put into circulation. He has seen them bearing the words 'not guaranteed.'"

"Well," said Claparon, "they are not in general circulation; they are in the hands of a man with whom I do a great deal of business, — Père Bidault. That is why I affixed the words 'not guaranteed.' If the notes were intended for circulation you would have made them payable to his order. Monsieur Lebas will understand my position. What do these notes represent? The price of landed property. Paid by whom? By Birotteau. Why should I guarantee Birotteau by my signature? We are to pay, each on his own account, our half of the price of the said land. Now, it is enough to be jointly and separately liable to the sellers. I hold

inflexibly to one commercial rule: I never give my guarantee uselessly, any more than I give my receipt for moneys not yet paid. He who signs, pays. I don't wish to be liable to pay three times."

"Three times!" said César.

"Yes, monsieur," said Claparon, "I have already guaranteed Birotteau to the sellers, why should I guarantee him again to the bankers? The circumstances in which we are placed are very hard. Roguin has carried off a hundred thousand francs of mine; therefore, my half of the property costs me five hundred thousand francs instead of four hundred thousand. Roguin has also carried off two hundred and forty thousand francs of Birotteau's. What would you do in my place, Monsieur Lebas? Stand in my skin for a moment and view the case. Give me your attention. Say that we are engaged in a transaction on equal shares: you provide the money for your share, I give bills for mine; I offer them to you, and you undertake, purely out of kindness, to convert them into money. You learn that I, Claparon, — banker, rich, respected (I accept all the virtues under the sun), — that the virtuous Claparon is on the verge of failure, with six million of liabilities to meet: would you, at such a moment, give your signature to guarantee mine? Of course not; you would be mad to do it. Well, Monsieur Lebas, Birotteau is in the position which I have supposed for Claparon. Don't you see that if I indorse for him I am liable not only for my own share of the purchase, but I shall also be compelled to reimburse to the full amount of Birotteau's paper, and without —"

"To whom?" asked Birotteau, interrupting him.

"— without gaining his half of the property?" said Claparon, paying no attention to the interruption. "For I should have no rights in it; I should have to buy it over again; consequently, I repeat, I should have to pay for it three times."

"Reimburse whom?" persisted Birotteau.

"Why, the holder of the notes, if I were to indorse, and you were to fail."

"I shall not fail, monsieur," said Birotteau.

"Very good," said Claparon. "But you have been a judge, and you are a clever merchant; you know very well that we should look ahead and foresee everything; you can't be surprised that I should attend to my business properly."

"Monsieur Claparon is right," said Joseph Lebas.

"I am right," said Claparon, — "right commercially. But this is an affair of landed property. Now, what must I have? Money, to pay the sellers. We won't speak now of the two hundred and forty thousand francs, — which I am sure Monsieur Birotteau will be able to raise soon," said Claparon, looking at Lebas. "I have come now to ask for a trifle, merely twenty-five thousand francs," he added, turning to Birotteau.

"Twenty-five thousand francs!" cried César, feeling ice in his veins instead of blood. "What claim have you, monsieur?"

"What claim? Hey! we have to make a payment and execute the deeds before a notary. Among ourselves, of course, we could come to an understanding about the payment, but when we have to do with a financial public functionary it is quite another thing! He won't palaver; he'll trust you no farther than he

can see. We have got to come down with forty thousand francs, to secure the registration, this week. I did not expect reproaches in coming here, for, thinking this twenty-five thousand francs might be inconvenient to you just now, I meant to tell you that, by a mere chance, I have saved you — "

"What?" said Birotteau, with that rending cry of anguish which no man ever mistakes.

"A trifle! The notes amounting to twenty-five thousand francs on divers securities which Roguin gave me to negotiate I have credited to you, for the registration payment and the fees, of which I will send you an account; there will be a small amount to deduct, and you will then owe me about six or seven thousand francs."

"All that seems to me perfectly proper," said Lebas. "In your place, monsieur, I should do the same towards a stranger."

"Monsieur Birotteau won't die of it," said Claparon; "it takes more than one shot to kill an old wolf. I have seen wolves with a ball in their head run, by God, like — wolves!"

"Who could have foreseen such villany as Roguin's?" said Lebas, as much alarmed by César's silence as by the discovery of such enormous speculations outside of his friend's legitimate business of perfumery.

"I came very near giving Monsieur Birotteau a receipt for his four hundred thousand francs," said Claparon. "I should have blown up if I had, for I had given Roguin a hundred thousand myself the day before. Our mutual confidence is all that saved me. Whether the money were in a lawyer's hands or in

mine until the day came to pay for the land, seemed to us all a matter of no importance."

"It would have been better," said Lebas, "to have kept the money in the Bank of France until the time came to make the payments."

"Roguin was the bank to me," said César. "But he is in the speculation," he added, looking at Claparon.

"Yes, for one-fourth, by verbal agreement only. After being such a fool as to let him run off with my money, I sha'n't be such a blockhead as to throw any more after it. If he sends me my hundred thousand francs, and two hundred thousand more for his half of our share, I shall then see about it. But he will take good care not to send them for an affair which needs five years' pot-boiling before you get any broth. If he has only carried off, as they say, three hundred thousand francs, he will want the income of all of that to live suitably in foreign countries."

"The villain!"

"Eh! the devil take him! It was a woman who got him where he is," said Claparon. "Where's the old man who can answer for himself that he won't be the slave of his last fancy? None of us, who think ourselves so virtuous, know how we shall end. A last passion, — eh! it is the most violent of all! Look at Cardot, Camusot, Matifat; they all have their mistresses! If we have been gobbled up to satisfy Roguin's, is n't it our own fault? Why did n't we distrust a notary who meddles with speculations? Every notary, every broker, every trustee who speculates is an object of suspicion. Failure for them is fraudulent bankruptcy; they are sure to go before the criminal courts, and

therefore they prefer to run out of the country. I sha'n't commit such a stupid blunder again. Well, well! we are too shaky ourselves in the matter not to let judgment go by default against the men we have dined with, who have given us fine balls, — men of the world, in short. Nobody complains; we are all to blame."

"Very much to blame," said Birotteau. "The laws about failures and insolvency should be looked into."

"If you have any need of me," said Lebas to César, "I am at your service."

"Monsieur does not need any one," said the irrepressible chatterbox, whose floodgates du Tillet had set wide open when he turned on the water, — for Claparon was now repeating a lesson du Tillet had cleverly taught him. "His course is quite clear. Roguin's assets will give fifty per cent to the creditors, so little Crottat tells me. Besides this, Monsieur Birotteau gets back the forty thousand on his note to Roguin's client, which the lender never paid over; then, of course, he can borrow on that property. We have four months ahead before we are obliged to make a payment of two hundred thousand francs to the sellers. Between now and then, Monsieur Birotteau can pay off his notes; though of course he can't count on what Roguin has carried off to meet them. Even if Monsieur Birotteau should be rather pinched, with a little manipulation he will come out all right."

The poor man took courage, as he heard Claparon analyzing the affair and summing it up with advice as to his future conduct. His countenance grew firm and

decided; and he began to think highly of the late commercial traveller's capacity. Du Tillet had thought best to let Claparon believe himself really the victim of Roguin. He had given Claparon a hundred thousand francs to pay over to Roguin the day before the latter's flight, and Roguin had returned the money to du Tillet. Claparon, therefore, to that extent was playing a genuine part; and he told whoever would listen to him that Roguin had cost him a hundred thousand francs. Du Tillet thought Claparon was not bold enough, and fancied he had still too much honor and decency to make it safe to trust him with the full extent of his plans; and he knew him to be mentally incapable of conjecturing them.

"If our first friend is not our first dupe, we shall never find a second," he made answer to Claparon, on the day when his catchpenny banker reproached him for the trick; and he flung him away like a wornout instrument.

Monsieur Lebas and Claparon went out together.

"I shall pull through," said Birotteau to himself. "My liabilities amount to two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs; that is, sixty-five thousand in bills for the costs of the ball, and a hundred and seventy-five thousand given in notes for the lands. To meet these, I have my share of Roguin's assets, say perhaps one hundred thousand francs; and I can cancel the loan on my property in the Faubourg du Temple, as the mortgagee never paid the money, — in all, one hundred and forty thousand. All depends on making a hundred thousand francs out of Cephalic Oil, and waiting patiently, with the help of a few notes, or a

credit at a banker's, until I repair my losses or the lands about the Madeleine reach their full value."

When a man crushed by misfortune is once able to make the fiction of a hope for himself by a series of arguments, more or less reasonable, with which he bolsters himself up to rest his head, it often happens that he is really saved. Many a man has derived energy from the confidence born of illusions. Possibly, hope is the better half of courage; indeed, the Catholic religion makes it a virtue. Hope! has it not sustained the weak, and given the fainting heart time and patience to await the chances and changes of life? César resolved to confide his situation to his wife's uncle before seeking for succor elsewhere. But as he walked down the Rue Saint Honoré towards the Rue des Bourdonnais, he endured an inward anguish and distress which shook him so violently that he fancied his health was giving way. His bowels seemed on fire. It is an established fact that persons who feel through their diaphragms suffer in those parts when overtaken by misfortune, just as others whose perceptions are in their heads suffer from cerebral pains and affections. In great crises, the physical powers are attacked at the point where the individual temperament has placed the vital spark. Feeble beings have the colic. Napoleon slept. Before assailing the confidence of a life-long friendship, and breaking down all the barriers of pride and self-assurance, an honorable man must needs feel in his heart — and feel it more than once — the spur of that cruel rider, necessity. Thus it happened that Birotteau had been goaded for two days before he could bring himself to seek his uncle; it was, indeed, only family reasons

which finally decided him to do so. In any state of the case, it was his duty to explain his position to the severe old ironmonger, his wife's uncle. Nevertheless, as he reached the house he felt that inward faintness which a child feels when taken to a dentist's; but this shrinking of the heart involved the whole of his life, past, present, and to come, — it was not the fugitive pain of a moment. He went slowly up the stairs.

II.

THE old man was reading the "Constitutionel" in his chimney-corner, before a little round table on which stood his frugal breakfast, — a roll, some butter, a plate of Brie cheese, and a cup of coffee.

"Here is true wisdom," thought Birotteau, envying his uncle's life.

"Well!" said Pillerault, taking off his spectacles, "I heard at the café David last night about Roguin's affair, and the assassination of his mistress, la belle Hollandaise. I hope, as we desire to be actual owners of the property, that you obtained Claparon's receipt for the money."

"Alas! uncle, no. The trouble is just there, — you have put your finger upon the sore."

"Good God! you are ruined!" cried Pillerault, letting fall his newspaper, which Birotteau picked up, though it was the "Constitutionel."

Pillerault was so violently roused by his reflections that his face — like the image on a medal and of the same stern character — took a deep bronze tone, such as the metal itself takes under the oscillating tool of a coiner; he remained motionless, gazing through the window-panes at the opposite wall, but seeing nothing, — listening, however, to Birotteau. Evidently he heard and judged, and weighed the *pros* and *cons* with the inflexibility of a Minos who had crossed the Styx of

commerce when he quitted the Quai des Morfondus for his little third storey.

"Well, uncle?" said Birotteau, who waited for an answer, after closing what he had to say with an entreaty that Pillerault would sell sixty thousand francs out of the Funds.

"Well, my poor nephew, I cannot do it; you are too heavily involved. The Ragons and I each lose our fifty thousand francs. Those worthy people have, by my advice, sold their shares in the mines of Wortschin: I feel obliged, in case of loss, not to return the capital of course, but to succor them, and to succor my niece and Césarine. You may all want bread, and you shall find it with me."

"Want bread, uncle?"

"Yes, bread. See things as they are, César. *You cannot extricate yourself.* With five thousand six hundred francs income, I could set aside four thousand francs for you and the Ragons. If misfortune overtakes you, — I know Constance, she will work herself to the bone, she will deny herself everything; and so will you, César."

"All is not hopeless, uncle."

"I cannot see it as you do."

"I will prove that you are mistaken."

"Nothing would give me greater happiness."

Birotteau left Pillerault without another word. He had come to seek courage and consolation, and he received a blow less severe, perhaps, than the first; but instead of striking his head it struck his heart, and his heart was the whole of life to the poor man. After going down a few stairs he returned.

"Monsieur," he said, in a cold voice, "Constance knows nothing. Keep my secret at any rate; beg the Ragons to say nothing, and not to take from my home the peace I need so much in my struggle against misfortune."

Pillerault made a gesture of assent.

"Courage, César!" he said. "I see you are angry with me; but later, when you think of your wife and daughter, you will do me justice."

Discouraged by his uncle's opinion, and recognizing its clear-sightedness, César tumbled from the heights of hope into the miry marshes of doubt and uncertainty. In such horrible commercial straits a man, unless his soul is tempered like that of Pillerault, becomes the plaything of events; he follows the ideas of others, or his own, as a traveller pursues a will-o'-the-wisp. He lets the gust whirl him along, instead of lying flat and not looking up as it passes; or else gathering himself together to follow the direction of the storm till he can escape from the edges of it. In the midst of his pain Birotteau bethought him of the steps he ought to take about the mortgage on his property. He turned towards the Rue Vivienne to find Derville, his solicitor, and institute proceedings at once, in case the lawyer should see any chance of annulling the agreement. He found Derville sitting by the fire, wrapped in a white woollen dressing-gown, calm and composed in manner, like all lawyers long used to receiving terrible confidences. Birotteau noticed for the first time in his life this necessary coldness, which struck a chill to the soul of a man grasped by the fever of imperilled interests, — passionate, wounded, and cruelly gashed in his life, his honor,

his wife, his child, as César showed himself to be while he related his misfortunes.

"If it can be proved," said Derville, after listening to him, "that the lender no longer had in Roguin's hands the sum which Roguin pretended to borrow for you upon your property, then, as there has been no delivery of the money, there is ground for annulling the contract; the lender may seek redress through the warranty, as you will for your hundred thousand francs. I will answer for the case, however, as much as one can ever answer. No case is won till it is tried."

The opinion of so able a lawyer restored César's courage a little, and he begged Derville to obtain a judgment within a fortnight. The solicitor replied that it might take three months to get such a judgment as would annul the agreement.

"Three months!" cried Birotteau, who needed immediate resources.

"Though we may get the case at once on the docket, we cannot make your adversary keep pace with us. He will employ all the law's delays, and the barristers are seldom ready. Perhaps your opponents will let the case go by default. We can't always get on as we wish," said Derville, smiling.

"In the commercial courts —" began Birotteau.

"Oh!" said the lawyer, "the judges of the commercial courts and the judges of the civil courts are different sorts of judges. You dash through things. At the Palais de Justice we have stricter forms. Forms are the bulwark of law. How would you like slap-dash judgments which can't be appealed, and which would make you lose forty thousand francs? Well, your ad-

versary, who sees that sum involved, will defend himself. Delays may be called judicial fortifications."

"You are right," said Birotteau, bidding Derville good-by, and going hurriedly away, with death in his heart.

"They are all right. Money! money! I must have money!" he cried as he went along the streets, talking to himself like other busy men in the turbulent and seething city, which a modern poet has called a vat. When he entered his shop, the clerk who had carried round the bills informed him that the customers had returned the receipts and kept the accounts, as it was so near the first of January.

"Then there is no money to be had anywhere," said the perfumer, aloud.

He bit his lips, for the clerks all raised their heads and looked at him.

Five days went by; five days during which Braschon, Lourdois, Thorein, Grindot, Chaffaroux, and all the other creditors with unpaid bills passed through the chameleon phases that are customary to uneasy creditors before they take the sanguinary colors of the commercial Bellona, and reach a state of peaceful confidence. In Paris the astringent stage of suspicion and mistrust is as quick to declare itself as the expansive flow of confidence is slow in gathering way. The creditor who has once turned into the narrow path of commercial fears and precautions speedily takes a course of malignant meanness which puts him below the level of his debtor. He passes from specious civility to impatient rage, to the surly clamor of importunity, to bursts of disappointment, to the livid coldness of a mind

made up to vengeance, and the scowling insolence of a summons before the courts. Braschon, the rich upholsterer of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, who was not invited to the ball, and was therefore stabbed in his self-love, sounded the charge; he insisted on being paid within twenty-four hours. He demanded security; not an attachment on the furniture, but a second mortgage on the property in the Faubourg du Temple.

In spite of such attacks and the violence of these recriminations, a few peaceful intervals occurred, when Birotteau breathed once more; but instead of resolutely facing and vanquishing the first skirmishings of adverse fortune, César employed his whole mind in the effort to keep his wife, the only person able to advise him, from knowing anything about them. He guarded the very threshold of his door, and set a watch on all around him. He took Célestin into confidence so far as to admit a momentary embarrassment, and Célestin examined him with an amazed and inquisitive look. In his eyes César lessened, as men lessen in presence of disasters when accustomed only to success, and when their whole mental strength consists of knowledge which commonplace minds acquire through routine.

Menaced as he was on so many sides at once, and without the energy or capacity to defend himself, César nevertheless had the courage to look his position in the face. To meet the payments on his house and on his loans, and to pay his rents and his current expenses, he required, between the end of December and the fifteenth of January, a sum of sixty thousand francs, half of which must be obtained before the thirtieth of December-

All his resources put together gave him a scant twenty thousand; he lacked ten thousand francs for the first payments. To his mind the position did not seem desperate; for like an adventurer who lives from day to day, he saw only the present moment. He resolved to attempt, before the news of his embarrassments was made public, what seemed to him a great stroke, and seek out the famous François Keller, banker, orator, and philanthropist, celebrated for his benevolence and for his desire to serve the interests of Parisian commerce, — with the view, we may add, of being always returned to the Chamber as a deputy of Paris.

The banker was Liberal, Birotteau was Royalist; but the perfumer judged by his own heart, and believed that the difference in their political opinions would only be one reason the more for obtaining the credit he intended to ask. In case actual securities were required he felt no doubt of Popinot's devotion, from whom he expected to obtain some thirty thousand francs, which would enable him to await the result of his law-suit by satisfying the demands of the most exacting of the creditors. The demonstrative perfumer, who told his dear Constance, with his head on her pillow, the smallest thoughts and feelings of his whole life, looking for the lights of her contradiction, and gathering courage as he did so, was now prevented from speaking of his situation to his head-clerk, his uncle, or his wife. His thoughts were therefore doubly heavy, — and yet the generous martyr preferred to suffer, rather than fling the fiery brand into the soul of his wife. He meant to tell her of the danger when it was over. The awe with which she inspired him gave him courage. He went every

morning to hear Mass at Saint-Roch, and took God for his confidant.

"If I do not meet a soldier coming home from Saint-Roch, my request will be granted. That will be God's answer," he said to himself, after praying that God would help him.

And he was overjoyed when it happened that he did not meet a soldier. Still, his heart was so heavy that he needed another heart on which to lean and moan Césarine, to whom from the first he confided the fatal truth, knew all his secrets. Many stolen glances passed between them, glances of despair or smothered hope, — interpellations of the eye darted with mutual eagerness, inquiries and replies full of sympathy, rays passing from soul to soul. Birotteau compelled himself to seem gay, even jovial, with his wife. If Constance asked a question — bah! everything was going well; Popinot (about whom César knew nothing) was succeeding; the oil was looking up; the notes with Claparon would be paid; there was nothing to fear. His mock joy was terrible to witness. When his wife had fallen asleep in the sumptuous bed, Birotteau would rise to a sitting posture and think over his troubles. Césarine would sometimes creep in with bare feet, in her chemise, and a shawl over her white shoulders.

"Papa, I hear you, — you are crying," she would say, crying herself.

Birotteau sank into such torpor, after writing the letter which asked for an interview with the great François Keller, that his daughter took him out for a walk through the streets of Paris. For the first

time he was roused to notice enormous scarlet placards on all the walls, and his eyes encountered the words "Cephalic Oil."

While catastrophes thus threatened "The Queen of Roses" to westward, the house of A. Popinot was rising, radiant in the eastern splendors of success. By the advice of Gaudissart and Finot, Anselme launched his oil heroically. Two thousand placards were pasted in three days on the most conspicuous spots in all Paris. No one could avoid coming face to face with Cephalic Oil, and reading a pithy sentence, constructed by Finot, which announced the impossibility of forcing the hair to grow and the dangers of dyeing it, and was judiciously accompanied by a quotation from Vauquelin's report to the Academy of Sciences, — in short, a regular certificate of life for dead hair, offered to all those who used Cephalic Oil. Every hair-dresser in Paris, and all the perfumers, ornamented their doorways with gilt frames containing a fine impression of the prospectus on vellum, at the top of which shone the engraving of Hero and Leander, reduced in size, with the following assertion as an epigraph: "The peoples of antiquity preserved their hair by the use of Cephalic Oil."

"He has devised frames, permanent frames, perpetual placards," said Birotteau to himself, quite dumbfounded as he stood before the shop-front of the Cloche d'Argent.

"Then you have not seen," said his daughter, "the frame which Monsieur Anselme brought with his own hands, sending Célestin three hundred bottles of oil?"

"No," he said.

"Célestin has already sold fifty to passers-by, and sixty to regular customers."

"Ah!" exclaimed César.

The poor man, bewildered by the clash of bells which misery jangles in the ears of its victims, lived and moved in a dazed condition. The night before, Popinot had waited more than an hour to see him, and went away after talking with Constance and Césarine, who told him that César was absorbed in his great enterprise.

"Ah, true! the lands about the Madeleine."

Happily, Popinot — who for a month had never left the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, sitting up all night, and working all Sunday at the manufactory — had seen neither the Ragons, nor Pillerault, nor his uncle the judge. He allowed himself but two hours' sleep, poor lad! he had only two clerks, but at the rate things were now going, he would soon need four. In business, opportunity is everything. He who does not spring upon the back of success and clutch it by the mane, lets fortune escape. Popinot felt that his suit would prosper if six months hence he could say to his uncle and aunt, "I am secure; my fortune is made," and carry to Birotteau thirty or forty thousand francs as his share of the profits. He was ignorant of Roguin's flight, of the disasters and embarrassments which were closing down on César, and he therefore could say nothing indiscreet to Madame Birotteau.

Popinot had promised Finot five hundred francs for every puff in a first-class newspaper, and already there were ten of them; three hundred francs for every second-rate paper, and there were ten of those, — in all of them Cephalic Oil was mentioned three times

a month! Finot saw three thousand francs for himself out of these eight thousand. — his first stake on the vast green table of speculation! He therefore sprang like a lion on his friends and acquaintances; he haunted the editorial rooms; he wormed himself to the very bedsides of editors in the morning, and prowled about the lobby of the theatres at night. "Think of my oil, dear friend; I have no interest in it — bit of good fellowship, you know!" "Gaudissart, jolly dog!" Such was the first and the last phrase of all his allocutions. He begged for the bottom lines of the final columns of the newspapers, and inserted articles for which he asked no pay from the editors. Wily as a supernumerary who wants to be an actor, wide-awake as an errand-boy who earns sixty francs a month, he wrote wheedling letters, flattered the self-love of editors-in-chief, and did them base services to get his articles inserted. Money, dinners, platitudes, all served the purpose of his eager activity. With tickets for the theatre, he bribed the printers who about midnight are finishing up the columns of a newspaper with little facts and ready-made items kept on hand. At that hour Finot hovered around printing-presses, busy, apparently, with proofs to be corrected. Keeping friends with everybody, he brought Cephalic Oil to a triumphant success over Pâte de Regnauld, and Brazilian Mixture, and all the other inventions which had the genius to comprehend journalistic influence and the suction power that reiterated newspaper articles have upon the public mind. In these early days of their innocence many journalists were like cattle; they were unaware of their inborn power; their heads were full of ac-

tresses, — Florine, Tullia, Mariette, etc. They laid down the law to everybody, but they picked up nothing for themselves. As Finot's schemes did not concern actresses who wanted applause, nor plays to be puffed, nor vaudevilles to be accepted, nor articles which had to be paid for, — on the contrary, he paid money on occasion, and gave timely breakfasts, — there was soon not a newspaper in Paris which did not mention Cephalic Oil, and call attention to its remarkable concurrence with the principles of Vauquelin's analysis; ridiculing all those who thought hair could be made to grow, and proclaiming the danger of dyeing it.

These articles rejoiced the soul of Gaudissart, who used them as ammunition to destroy prejudice, bringing to bear upon the provinces what his successors have since named, in honor of him, "the charge of the tongue-battery." In those days Parisian newspapers ruled the departments, which were still (unhappy regions!) without *local organs*. The papers were therefore soberly studied, from the title to the name of the printer, — a last line which may have hidden the ironies of persecuted opinion. Gaudissart, thus backed up by the press, met with startling success from the very first town which he favored with his tongue. Every shopkeeper in the provinces wanted the gilt frames, and the prospectuses with Hero and Leander at the top of them.

In Paris, Finot fired at Macassar Oil that delightful joke which made people so merry at the Funambules, when Pierrot, taking an old hair-broom, anointed it with Macassar Oil, and the broom incontinently became a mop. This ironical scene excited universal laughter. Finot gayly related in after days that without the

thousand crowns he earned through Cephalic Oil he should have died of misery and despair. To him a thousand crowns was fortune. It was in this campaign that he guessed — let him have the honor of being the first to do so — the illimitable power of advertisement, of which he made so great and so judicious a use. Three months later he became editor-in-chief of a little journal which he finally bought, and which laid the foundation of his ultimate success. Just as the tongue-battery of the illustrious Gaudissart, that Murat of travellers, when brought to bear upon the provinces and the frontiers, made the house of A. Popinot and Company a triumphant mercantile success in the country regions, so likewise did Cephalic Oil triumph in Parisian opinion, thanks to Finot's famishing assault upon the newspapers, which gave it as much publicity as that obtained by Brazilian Mixture and the Pâte de Regnauld. From the start, public opinion, thus carried by storm, begot three successes, three fortunes, and proved the advance guard of that invasion of ambitious schemes which since have poured their crowded battalions into the arena of journalism, for which they have created — oh, mighty revolution! — the paid advertisement. The name of A. Popinot and Company now flaunted on all the walls and all the shop-fronts. Incapable of perceiving the full bearing of such publicity, Birotteau merely said to his daughter, —

"Little Popinot is following in my steps."

He did not understand the difference of the times, nor appreciate the power of the novel methods of execution, whose rapidity and extent took in, far more promptly than ever before, the whole commercial uni-

verse. Birotteau had not set foot in his manufactory since the ball; he knew nothing therefore of the energy and enterprise displayed by Popinot. Anselme had engaged all César's workmen, and often slept himself on the premises. His fancy pictured Césarine sitting on the cases, and hovering over the shipments; her name seemed printed on the bills; and as he worked with his coat off, and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, courageously nailing up the cases himself, in default of the necessary clerks, he said in his heart, "She shall be mine!"

The following day César went to François Keller's house in Rue du Houssaye, having spent the night turning over in his mind what he ought to say, or ought not to say, to a leading man in banking circles. Horrible palpitations of the heart assailed him as he approached the house of the Liberal banker, who belonged to a party accused, with good reason, of seeking the overthrow of the restored Bourbons. The perfumer, like all the lesser tradesmen of Paris, was ignorant of the habits and customs of the upper banking circles. Between the higher walks of finance and ordinary commerce, there is in Paris a class of secondary houses, useful intermediaries for banking interests, which find in them an additional security. Constance and Birotteau, who had never gone beyond their means, whose purse had never run dry, and who kept their moneys in their own possession, had so far never needed the services of these intermediary houses; they were therefore unknown in the higher regions of a bank. Perhaps it is a mistake not to take out credits, even if we do not need them. Opinions vary on this point. However that

may be, Birotteau now deeply regretted that his signature was unknown. Still, as deputy-mayor, and therefore known in politics, he thought he had only to present his name and be admitted: he was quite ignorant of the ceremonial, half regal, which attended an audience with François Keller. He was shown into a salon which adjoined the study of the celebrated banker, —celebrated in various ways. Birotteau found himself among a numerous company of deputies, writers, journalists, stock-brokers, merchants of the upper grades, agents, engineers, and above all satellites, or henchmen, who passed from group to group, and knocked in a peculiar manner at the door of the study, which they were, as it seemed, privileged to enter.

"What am I in the midst of all this?" thought Birotteau, quite bewildered by the stir of this intellectual kiln, where the daily bread of the opposition was kneaded and baked, and the scenes of the grand tragi-comedy played by the Left were rehearsed. On one side he heard them discussing the question of loans to complete the net-work of canals proposed by the department on highways; and the discussion involved millions! On the other, journalists, pandering to the banker's self-love, were talking about the session of the day before, and the impromptu speech of the great man. In the course of two long hours Birotteau saw the banker three times, as he accompanied certain persons of importance three steps from the door of his study. But François Keller went to the door of the antechamber with the last, who was General Foy.

"There is no hope for me!" thought Birotteau with a shrinking heart.

When the banker returned to his study, the troop of courtiers, friends, and self-seekers pressed round him like dogs pursuing a bitch. A few bold curs slipped, in spite of him, into the sanctum. The conferences lasted five, ten, or fifteen minutes. Some went away chapfallen; others affected satisfaction, and took on airs of importance. Time passed; Birotteau looked anxiously at the clock. No one paid the least attention to the hidden grief which moaned silently in the gilded armchair in the chimney corner, near the door of the cabinet where dwelt the universal panacea — credit! César remembered sadly that for a brief moment he too had been a king among his own people, as this man was a king daily; and he measured the depth of the abyss down which he had fallen. Ah, bitter thought! how many tears were driven back during those waiting hours! how many times did he not pray to God that this man might be favorable to him! for he saw, through the coarse varnish of popular good humor, a tone of insolence, a choleric tyranny, a brutal desire to rule, which terrified his gentle spirit. At last, when only ten or twelve persons were left in the room, Birotteau resolved that the next time the outer door of the study turned on its hinges he would rise and face the great orator, and say to him, "I am Birotteau!" The grenadier who sprang first into the redoubt at Moscow displayed no greater courage than César now summoned up to perform this act.

"After all, I am his mayor," he said to himself as he rose to proclaim his name.

The countenance of François Keller at once became affable; he evidently desired to be cordial. He glanced

at César's red ribbon, and stepping back, opened the door of his study and motioned him to enter, remaining himself for some time to speak with two men, who rushed in from the staircase with the violence of a waterspout.

"Decazes wants to speak to you," said one of them.

"It is a question of defeating the Pavillon Marsan!" cried the other. "The King's eyes are opened. He is coming round to us."

"We will go together to the Chamber," said the banker, striking the attitude of the frog who imitates an ox.

"How can he find time to think of business?" thought Birotteau, much disturbed.

The sun of successful superiority dazzled the perfumer, as light blinds those insects who seek the falling day or the half-shadows of a starlit night. On a table of immense size lay the budget, piles of the Chamber records, open volumes of the "Moniteur," with passages carefully marked, to throw at the head of a Minister his forgotten words and force him to recant them, under the jeering plaudits of a foolish crowd incapable of perceiving how circumstances alter cases. On another table were heaped portfolios, minutes, projects, specifications, and all the thousand memoranda brought to bear upon a man into whose funds so many nascent industries sought to dip. The royal luxury of this cabinet, filled with pictures, statues, and works of art; the encumbered chimney-piece; the accumulation of many interests, national and foreign, heaped together like bales, — all struck Birotteau's mind, dwarfed his powers, heightened his terror, and froze his blood.

On François Keller's desk lay bundles of notes and checks, letters of credit, and commercial circulars. Keller sat down and began to sign rapidly such letters as needed no examination.

"Monsieur, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

At these words, uttered for him alone by a voice which influenced all Europe, while the eager hand was running over the paper, the poor perfumer felt something that was like a hot iron in his stomach. He assumed the ingratiating manner which for ten years past the banker had seen all men put on when they wanted to get the better of him for their own purposes, and which gave him at once the advantage over them. François Keller accordingly darted at César a look which shot through his head, — a Napoleonic look. This imitation of Napoleon's glance was a silly satire, then popular with certain parvenus who had never been so much as the base coin of their emperor. This glance fell upon Birotteau, a devotee of the Right, a partisan of the government, — himself an element of monarchical election, — like the stamp of a custom-house officer affixed to a bale of merchandise.

"Monsieur, I will not waste your time; I will be brief. I come on commercial business only, — to ask if I can obtain a credit. I was formerly a judge of the commercial courts, and known to the Bank of France. You will easily understand that if I had plenty of ready money I need only apply there, where you are yourself a director. I had the honor of sitting on the Bench of commerce with Monsieur le baron Thibon, chairman of the committee on discounts; and he, most assuredly, would not refuse me. But up to this time I have never

made use of my credit or my signature; my signature is virgin, — and you know what difficulties that puts in the way of negotiation."

Keller moved his head, and Birotteau took the movement for one of impatience.

"Monsieur, these are the facts," he resumed. "I am engaged in an affair of landed property, outside of my business —"

François Keller, who continued to sign and read his documents, without seeming to listen to Birotteau, here turned round and made him a little sign of attention, which encouraged the poor man. He thought the matter was taking a favorable turn, and breathed again.

"Go on; I hear you," said Keller good-naturedly.

"I have purchased, at half its value, certain land about the Madeleine —"

"Yes; I heard Nucingen speak of that immense affair, — undertaken, I believe, by Claparon and Company."

"Well," continued César, "a credit of a hundred thousand francs, secured on my share of the purchase, will suffice to carry me along until I can reap certain profits from a discovery of mine in perfumery. Should it be necessary, I will cover your risk by notes on a new establishment, — the firm of A. Popinot —"

Keller seemed to care very little about the firm of Popinot; and Birotteau, perceiving that he had made a false move, stopped short; then, alarmed by the silence, he resumed, "As for the interest, we —"

"Yes, yes," said the banker, "the matter can be arranged; don't doubt my desire to be of service to you. Busy as I am, — for I have the finances of

Europe on my shoulders, and the Chamber takes all my time, — you will not be surprised to hear that I leave the vast bulk of our affairs to the examination of others. Go and see my brother Adolphe, downstairs; explain to him the nature of your securities; if he approves of the operation, come back here with him to-morrow or the day after, at five in the morning, — the hour at which I examine into certain business matters. We shall be proud and happy to obtain your confidence. You are one of those consistent royalists with whom, of course, we are political enemies, but whose good-will is always flattering — "

"Monsieur," said César, elated by this specimen of tribune eloquence, "I trust I am as worthy of the honor you do me as I was of the signal and royal favor which I earned by my services on the Bench of commerce, and by fighting — "

"Yes, yes," interrupted the banker, "your reputation is a passport, Monsieur Birotteau. You will, of course, propose nothing that is not feasible, and you can depend on our co-operation."

A lady, Madame Keller, one of the two daughters of the Comte de Gondreville, here opened a door which Birotteau had not observed.

"I hope to see you before you go to the Chamber," she said.

"It is two o'clock," exclaimed the banker; "the battle has begun. Excuse me, monsieur, it is a question of upsetting the ministry. See my brother — "

He conducted the perfumer to the door of the salon, and said to one of the servants, "Show monsieur the way to Monsieur Adolphe."

As César traversed a labyrinth of staircases, under the guidance of a man in livery, towards an office far less sumptuous but more useful than that of the head of the house, feeling himself astride the gentle steed of hope, he stroked his chin, and augured well from the flatteries of the great man. He regretted that an enemy of the Bourbons should be so gracious, so able, so fine an orator.

Full of these illusions he entered a cold bare room, furnished with two desks on rollers, some shabby arm-chairs, a threadbare carpet, and curtains that were much neglected. This cabinet was to that of the elder brother like a kitchen to a dining-room, or a work-room to a shop. Here were turned inside out all matters touching the bank and commerce; here all enterprises were sifted, and the first tithes levied, on behalf of the bank, upon the profits of industries judged worthy of being upheld. Here were devised those bold strokes by which short-lived monopolies were called into being and rapidly sucked dry. Here defects of legislation were chronicled; and bargains driven, without shame, for what the Bourse terms "pickings to be gobbled up," commissions exacted for the smallest services, such as lending their name to an enterprise, and allowing it credit. Here were hatched the specious, legal plots by which silent partnerships were taken in doubtful enterprises, that the bank might lie in wait for the moment of success, and then crush them and seize the property by demanding a return of the capital at a critical moment, — an infamous trick, which involves and ruins many small shareholders.

The two brothers had each selected his appropriate

part. Upstairs, François, the brilliant man of the world and of politics, assumed a regal air, bestowed courtesies and promises, and made himself agreeable to all. His manners were easy and complying; he looked at business from a lofty standpoint; he intoxicated new recruits and fledgling speculators with the wine of his favor and his fervid speech, as he made plain to them their own ideas. Downstairs, Adolphe unsaid his brother's words, excused him on the ground of political preoccupation, and cleverly slipped the rake along the cloth. He played the part of the responsible partner, the careful business man. Two words, two speeches, two interviews, were required before an understanding could be reached with this perfidious house. Often the gracious "yes" of the sumptuous upper floor became a dry "no" in Adolphe's region. This obstructive manœuvre gave time for reflection, and often served to fool unskilful applicants. As César entered, the banker's brother was conversing with the famous Palma, intimate adviser of the house of Keller, who retired on the appearance of the perfumer. When Birotteau had explained his errand, Adolphe — much the cleverest of the two brothers, a thorough lynx, with a keen eye, thin lips, and a dry skin — cast at Birotteau, lowering his head to look over his spectacles as he did so, a look which we must call the banker-look, — a cross between that of a vulture and that of an attorney; eager yet indifferent, clear yet vague, glittering though sombre.

"Have the goodness to send me the deeds relating to the affair of the Madeleine," he said; "our security in making you this credit lies there: we must examine them before we consent to make it, or discuss the terms.

If the affair is sound, we shall be willing, so as not to embarrass you, to take a share of the profits in place of receiving a discount."

"Well," thought Birotteau, as he walked away, "I see what it means. Like the hunted beaver, I am to give up a part of my skin. After all, it is better to be shorn than killed."

He went home smiling gayly, and his gayety was genuine.

"I am saved," he said to Césarine. "I am to have a credit with the Kellers."

III.

It was not until the 29th of December that Birotteau was allowed to re-enter Adolphe's cabinet. The first time he called, Adolphe had gone into the country to look at a piece of property which the great orator thought of buying. The second time, the two Kellers were deeply engaged for the whole day, preparing a tender for a loan proposed in the Chamber, and they begged Monsieur Birotteau to return on the following Friday. These delays were killing to the poor man. But Friday came at last. Birotteau found himself in the cabinet, placed in one corner of the fireplace, facing the light from a window, with Adolphe Keller opposite to him.

"They are all right, monsieur," said the banker, pointing to the deeds. "But what payments have you made on the price of the land?"

"One hundred and forty thousand francs."

"Cash?"

"Notes."

"Are they paid?"

"They are not yet due."

"But supposing you have paid more than the present value of the property, where will be our security? It will rest solely on the respect you inspire, and the consideration in which you are held. Business is not conducted on sentiment. If you had paid two hundred thousand francs, supposing that there were another one

hundred thousand paid down in advance for possession of the land, we should then have the security of a hundred thousand francs, to warrant us in giving you a credit of one hundred thousand. The result might be to make us owners of your share by our paying for it, instead of your doing so; consequently we must be satisfied that the affair is a sound one. To wait five years to double our capital won't do for us; it is better to employ it in other ways. There are so many chances! You are trying to circulate paper to pay your notes when they fall due, — a dangerous game. It is wiser to step back for a better leap. The affair does not suit us."

This sentence struck Birotteau as if the executioner had stamped his shoulder with the marking-iron; he lost his head.

"Come," said Adolphe, "my brother feels a great interest in you; he spoke of you to me. Let us examine into your affairs," he added, glancing at César with the look of a courtesan eager to pay her rent.

Birotteau became Molineux, — a being at whom he had once laughed so loftily. Enticed along by the banker, — who enjoyed disentangling the bobbins of the poor man's thought, and who knew as well how to cross-question a merchant as Popinot the judge knew how to make a criminal betray himself, — César recounted all his enterprises; he put forward his Double Paste of Sultans and Carminative Balm, the Roguin affair, and his lawsuit about the mortgage on which he had received no money. As he watched the smiling, attentive face of Keller and the motions of his head, Birotteau said to himself, "He is listening; I interest him; I shall get my credit!" Adolphe Keller was laughing at

César, just as César had laughed at Molineux. Carried away by the lust of speech peculiar to those who are made drunk by misfortune, César revealed his inner man; he gave his measure when he ended by offering the security of Cephalic Oil and the firm of Popinot, — his last stake. The worthy man, led on by false hopes, allowed Adolphe Keller to sound and fathom him, and he stood revealed to the banker's eyes as a royalist jackass on the point of failure. Delighted to foresee the bankruptcy of a deputy-mayor of the arrondissement, an official just decorated, and a man in power, Keller now curtly told Birotteau that he could neither give him a credit nor say anything in his favor to his brother François. If François gave way to idiotic generosity, and helped people of another way of thinking from his own, men who were his political enemies, he, Adolphe, would oppose with might and main any attempt to make a dupe of him, and would prevent him from holding out a hand to the adversary of Napoleon, wounded at Saint-Roch. Birotteau, exasperated, tried to say something about the cupidity of the great banking-houses, their harshness, their false philanthropy; but he was seized with so violent a pain that he could scarcely stammer a few words about the Bank of France, from which the Kellers were allowed to borrow.

"Yes," said Adolphe Keller; "but the Bank would never discount paper which a private bank refused."

"The Bank of France," said Birotteau, "has always seemed to me to miss its vocation when it congratulates itself, as it does in presenting its reports, on never losing more than one or two hundred thousand francs

through Parisian commerce: it should be the guardian and protector of Parisian commerce."

Adolphe smiled, and got up with the air and gesture of being bored.

"If the Bank were mixed up as silent partners with people who are involved in the most knavish and hazardous market in the world, it would soon have to hand in its schedule. It has, even now, immense difficulty in protecting itself against forgeries and false circulations of all kinds. Where would it be if it had to take account of the business of every one who wanted to get something out of it?"

"Where shall I find ten thousand francs for to-morrow, the THIRTIETH?" cried Birotteau, as he crossed the courtyard.

According to Parisian custom, notes were paid on the thirtieth, if the thirty-first was a holiday.

As César reached the outer gate, his eyes bathed in tears, he scarcely saw a fine English horse, covered with sweat, which drew the handsomest cabriolet that rolled in those days along the pavements of Paris, and which was now pulled up suddenly beside him. He would gladly have been run over and crushed by it; if he died by accident, the confusion of his affairs would be laid to that circumstance. He did not recognize du Tillet, who in elegant morning dress jumped lightly down, throwing the reins to his groom and a blanket over the back of his smoking thoroughbred.

"What chance brings you here?" said the former clerk to his old patron.

Du Tillet knew very well what it was, for the Kellers

had made inquiries of Claparon, who by referring them to du Tillet had demolished the past reputation of the poor man. Though quickly checked, the tears on César's face spoke volumes.

"Is it possible that you have asked assistance from these Bedouins?" said du Tillet, "these cut-throats of commerce, full of infamous tricks; who run up indigo when they have monopolized the trade, and pull down rice to force the holders to sell at low prices, and so enable them to manage the market? Atrocious pirates, who have neither faith, nor law, nor soul, nor honor! You don't know what they are capable of doing. They will give you a credit if they think you have got a good thing, and close it the moment you get into the thick of the enterprise; and then you will be forced to make it all over to them, at any villanous price they choose to give. Havre, Bordeaux, Marseilles, could tell you tales about them! They make use of politics to cover up their filthy ways. If I were you I should get what I could out of them in any way, and without scruple. Let us walk on, Birotteau. Joseph, lead the horse about, he is too hot: the devil! he is a capital of a thousand crowns."

So saying, he turned toward the boulevard.

"Come, my dear master, — for you were once my master, — tell me, are you in want of money? Have they asked you for securities, the scoundrels? I, who know you, I offer you money on your simple note. I have made an honorable fortune with infinite pains. I began it in Germany; I may as well tell you that I bought up the debts of the king, at sixty per cent of their amount: your indorsement was very useful to me at that time,

and I am not ungrateful, — not I. If you want ten thousand francs, they are yours."

"Du Tillet!" cried César, "can it be true? you are not joking with me? Yes, I am rather pinched, but only for a moment."

"I know, — that affair of Roguin," replied du Tillet. "Hey! I am in for ten thousand francs which the old rogue borrowed of me just before he went off; but Madame Roguin will pay them back from her dower. I have advised the poor woman not to be so foolish as to spend her own fortune in paying debts contracted for a prostitute. Of course, it would be well if she paid everything, but she cannot favor some creditors to the detriment of others. You are not a Roguin; I know you," said du Tillet, — "you would blow your brains out rather than make me lose a sou. Here we are at Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin; come home with me."

The upstart took pleasure in leading his old master through a gorgeous appartement, instead of entering at once by the counting-room; he led him slowly that he might see the sumptuous dining-room, decorated with pictures bought in Germany, and the two salons, of an elegance and luxury Birotteau had never beheld except in the mansion of the Duc de Lenoncourt. The eyes of the good bourgeois were dazzled by the gilded walls, the works of art, the precious vases, and distracting bric-a-brac, and all the many pretty details before which the luxury of Madame César's appartement paled. Knowing the cost of his own folly, César asked himself, "Where did he get all these millions?"

They entered a bedroom, with which Madame Birotteau's compared like that of a chorus-singer's on a

fourth floor with the appartement of a prima-donna. The ceiling was of violet-colored satin, heightened in its effect by folds of white satin; a rug of ermine lay at the bedside, and contrasted with the purple tones of a Turkish carpet. The furniture and all the accessories were novel in shape, costly, and choice in character. Birotteau paused before an exquisite clock, decorated with Cupid and Psyche, just designed for a famous banker, from whom du Tillet had obtained the sole copy ever made of it. The former master and his former clerk at last reached an elegant coquettish cabinet, more redolent of love than finance. Madame Roguin had doubtless contributed, in return for the care bestowed upon her fortune, the paper-knife in chiselled gold, the paper-weights of carved malachite, and all the costly knick-knacks of unrestrained luxury. The carpet, one of the rich products of Belgium, was as pleasant to the eye as to the foot which felt the soft thickness of its texture. Du Tillet made the poor, amazed, bewildered perfumer sit down at a corner of the fireplace.

"Will you breakfast with me?"

He rang the bell. Enter a footman better dressed than Birotteau.

"Tell Monsieur Legras to come here, and then find Joseph at the door of the Messrs. Keller; tell him to return to the stable. Leave word with Adolphe Keller that instead of going to see him, I shall expect him at the Bourse; and order breakfast served immediately."

These commands amazed César.

"He whistles to that formidable Adolphe Keller like a dog! — he, du Tillet!"

A little tiger, about a thumb high, set out a table which Birotteau had not observed, so slim was it, and brought in a pâté de foie gras, a bottle of claret, and a number of dainty dishes which only appeared in Birotteau's household once in three months, on great festive occasions. Du Tillet enjoyed the effect. His hatred towards the only man who had it in his power to despise him burned so hotly that Birotteau seemed, even to his own mind, like a sheep defending itself against a tiger. For an instant a generous idea entered du Tillet's heart: he asked himself if his vengeance were not sufficiently accomplished. He hesitated between this awakened mercy and his dormant hate.

"I can annihilate him commercially," he thought; "I have the power of life or death over him, — over his wife who insulted me, and his daughter whose hand once seemed to me a fortune. I have got his money; suppose I content myself with letting the poor fool swim at the end of a line I'll hold for him?"

Honest minds are devoid of tact; their excellence is uncalculating, even unreflecting, because they are wholly without evasions or mental reservations of their own. Birotteau now brought about his downfall; he incensed the tiger, pierced him to the heart without knowing it, made him implacable by a thoughtless word, a eulogy, a virtuous recognition, — by the kind-heartedness, as it were, of his own integrity. When the cashier entered, du Tillet motioned him to take notice of César.

"Monsieur Legras, bring me ten thousand francs, and a note of hand for that amount, drawn to my order, at ninety days' sight, by monsieur, who is Monsieur César Birotteau, you know."

Du Tillet cut the pâté, poured out a glass of claret, and urged César to eat. The poor man felt he was saved, and gave way to convulsive laughter; he played with his watch-chain, and only put a mouthful into his mouth, when du Tillet said to him, "You are not eating!" Birotteau thus betrayed the depths of the abyss into which du Tillet's hand had plunged him, from which that hand now withdrew him, and into which it had the power to plunge him again. When the cashier returned, and César signed the note, and felt the ten bank-notes in his pocket, he was no longer master of himself. A moment sooner, and the Bank, his neighborhood, every one, was about to know that he could not meet his payments, and he must have told his ruin to his wife; now, all was safe! The joy of this deliverance equalled in its intensity the tortures of his peril. The eyes of the poor man moistened, in spite of himself.

"What is the matter, my dear master?" asked du Tillet. "Would you not do for me to-morrow what I do for you to-day? Is it not as simple as saying, How do you do?"

"Du Tillet," said the worthy man, with gravity and emphasis, and rising to take the hand of his former clerk, "I give you back my esteem."

"What! had I lost it?" cried du Tillet, so violently stabbed in the very bosom of his prosperity that the color came into his face.

"Lost? — well, not precisely," said Birotteau, thunder-struck at his own stupidity; "they told me certain things about your *liaison* with Madame Roguin. The devil! taking the wife of another man —"

"You are beating round the bush, old fellow," thought du Tillet, and as the words crossed his mind he came back to his original project, and vowed to bring that virtue low, to trample it under foot, to render despicable in the marts of Paris the honorable and virtuous merchant who had caught him, red-handed, in a theft. All hatreds, public or private, from woman to woman, from man to man, have no other cause than some such detection. People do not hate each other for injured interests, for wounds, not even for a blow; all such wrongs can be redressed. But to have been seized, *flagrante delicto*, in a base act! The duel which follows between the criminal and the witness of his crime ends only with the death of the one or of the other.

"Oh! Madame Roguin!" said du Tillet, jestingly, "don't you call that a feather in a young man's cap? I understand you, my dear master; somebody has told you that she lent me money. Well, on the contrary it is I who have protected her fortune, which was strangely involved in her husband's affairs. The origin of my fortune is pure, as I have just told you. I had nothing, you know. Young men are sometimes in positions of frightful necessity. They may lose their self-control in the depths of poverty, and if they make, as the Republic made, forced loans — well, they pay them back; and in so doing they are more honest than France herself."

"That is true," cried Birotteau. "My son, God — is it not Voltaire who says, —

"'He rendered repentance the virtue of mortals'?"

"Provided," answered du Tillet, stabbed afresh by this quotation, — "provided they do not carry off the property of their neighbors, basely, meanly; as, for example, you would do if you failed within three months, and my ten thousand francs went to perdition."

"I fail!" cried Birotteau, who had taken three glasses of wine, and was half-drunk with joy. "Everybody knows what I think about failure! Failure is death to a merchant; I should die of it!"

"I drink your health," said du Tillet.

"Your health and prosperity," returned César. "Why don't you buy your perfumery from me?"

"The fact is," said du Tillet, "I am afraid of Madame César; she always made an impression on me. If you had not been my master, on my word! I —"

"You are not the first to think her beautiful; others have desired her; but she loves me! Well, now, du Tillet, my friend," resumed Birotteau, "don't do things by halves."

"What is it?"

Birotteau explained the affair of the lands to his former clerk, who pretended to open his eyes wide, and complimented the perfumer on his perspicacity and penetration, and praised the enterprise.

"Well, I am very glad to have your approbation; you are thought one of the wise-heads of the banking business, du Tillet. Dear fellow, you might get me a credit at the Bank of France, so that I can wait for the profits of Cephalic Oil at my ease."

"I can give you a letter to the firm of Nucingen," answered du Tillet, perceiving that he could make his victim dance all the figures in the reel of bankruptcy.

Ferdinand sat down to his desk and wrote the following letter: —

To Monsieur le baron de Nucingen:

My dear Baron, — The bearer of this letter is Monsieur César Birotteau, deputy-mayor of the second arrondissement, and one of the best known manufacturers of Parisian perfumery; he wishes to have business relations with your house. You can confidently do all that he asks of you; and in obliging him you will oblige

Your friend,

F. Du Tillet.

Du Tillet did not dot the *i* in his signature. To those with whom he did business this intentional error was a sign previously agreed upon. The strongest recommendations, the warmest appeals contained in the letter were to mean nothing. All such letters, in which exclamation marks were suppliants and du Tillet placed himself, as it were, upon his knees, were to be considered as extorted by necessity; he could not refuse to write them, but they were to be regarded as not written. Seeing the *i* without a dot, the correspondent was to amuse the petitioner with empty promises. Even men of the world, and sometimes the most distinguished, are thus gulled like children by business men, bankers, and lawyers, who all have a double signature, — one dead, the other living. The cleverest among them are fooled in this way. To understand the trick, we must experience the two-fold effects of a warm letter and a cold one

"You have saved me, du Tillet!" said César, reading the letter.

"Thank heaven!" said du Tillet, "ask for what

money you want. When Nucingen reads my letter he will give you all you need. Unhappily, my own funds are tied up for a few days; if not, I certainly would not send you to the great banking princes. The Kellers are mere pygmies compared with Baron de Nucingen. Law reappears on earth in Nucingen. With this letter of mine you can face the 15th of January, and after that, we will see about it. Nucingen and I are the best friends in the world; he would not disoblige me for a million."

"It is a guarantee in itself," thought Birotteau, as he went away full of gratitude to his old clerk. "Well, a benefit is never lost!" he continued, philosophizing very wide of the mark. Nevertheless, one thought embittered his joy. For several days he had prevented his wife from looking into the ledgers; he put the business on Célestin's shoulders and assisted in it himself; he wished, apparently, that his wife and daughter should be at liberty to take full enjoyment out of the beautiful appartement he had given them. But the first flush of happiness over, Madame Birotteau would have died rather than renounce her right of personally inspecting the affairs of the house, — of holding, as she phrased it, the handle of the frying-pan. Birotteau was at his wits' end; he had used all his cunning in trying to hide from his wife the symptoms of his embarrassment. Constance strongly disapproved of sending round the bills; she had scolded the clerks and accused Célestin of wishing to ruin the establishment, thinking that it was all his doing. Célestin, by Birotteau's order, had allowed himself to be scolded. In the eyes of the clerks Madame César governed her husband for though

it is possible to deceive the public, the inmates of a household are never deceived as to who exercises the real authority. Birotteau knew that he must now reveal his real situation to his wife, for the account with du Tillet needed an explanation. When he got back to the shop, he saw, not without a shudder, that Constance was sitting in her old place behind the counter, examining the expense account, and no doubt counting up the money in the desk.

"How will you meet your payments to-morrow?" she whispered as he sat down beside her.

"With money," he answered, pulling out the bank-bills, and signing to Célestin to take them.

"Where did you get that money?"

"I'll tell you all about it this evening. Célestin, write down, 'Last of March, note for ten thousand francs, to du Tillet's order.'"

"Du Tillet!" repeated Constance, struck with consternation.

"I am going to see Popinot," said César; "it is very wrong in me not to have gone before. Have we sold his oil?"

"The three hundred bottles he sent us are all gone."

"Birotteau, don't go out; I want to speak to you," said Constance, taking him by the arm, and leading him into her bedroom with an impetuosity which would have caused a laugh under other circumstances. "Du Tillet," she said, when she had made sure no one but Césarine was with them, — "du Tillet, who robbed us of three thousand francs! So you are doing business with du Tillet, — a monster, who wished to seduce me," she whispered in his ear.

"Folly of youth," said Birotteau, assuming for the nonce the tone of a free-thinker.

"Listen to me, Birotteau! You are all upset; you don't go to the manufactory any more; there is something the matter, I feel it! You must tell me; I must know what it is."

"Well," said Birotteau, "we came very near being ruined, — we were ruined this very morning; but it is all safe now."

And he told the horrible story of his two weeks' misery.

"So that was the cause of your illness!" exclaimed Constance.

"Yes, mamma," cried Césarine, "and papa has been so courageous! All that I desire in life is to be loved as he loves you. He has thought only of your grief."

"My dream is fulfilled!" said the poor woman, dropping upon the sofa at the corner of the fireplace, pale, livid, terrified. "I foresaw it all. I warned you on that fatal night, in our old room which you pulled to pieces, that we should have nothing left but our eyes to weep with. My poor Césarine, I —"

"Now, there you go!" cried César; "you will take away from me the courage I need."

"Forgive me, dear friend," said Constance, taking his hand, and pressing it with a tenderness which went to the heart of the poor man. "I do wrong. Misfortune has come; I will be silent, resigned, strong to bear it. No, you shall never hear a complaint from me." She threw herself into his arms, weeping, and whispering, "Courage, dear friend, courage! I will have courage for both, if necessary."

"My oil, wife, — my oil will save us!"

"May God help us!" said Constance.

"Anselme will help my father," said Césarine.

"I'll go and see him," cried César, deeply moved by the passionate accents of his wife, who after nineteen years of married life was not yet fully known to him. "Constance, fear nothing! Here, read du Tillet's letter to Monsieur de Nucingen; we are sure to obtain a credit. Besides," he said, allowing himself a necessary lie, "there is our uncle Pillerault; that is enough to give us courage."

"If that were all!" said Constance, smiling.

Birotteau, relieved of a heavy weight, walked away like a man suddenly set at liberty, though he felt within him that indefinable sinking which succeeds great moral struggles in which more of the nervous fluid, more of the will is emitted than should be spent at one time, and by which, if we may say so, the capital of the existence is drawn upon. Birotteau had aged already.

The house of A. Popinot, Rue des Cinq-Diamants, had undergone a great change in two months. The shop was repainted. The shelves, re-varnished and gilded and crowded with bottles, rejoiced the eye of those who had eyes to see the symptoms of prosperity. The floors were littered with packages and wrapping-paper. The storerooms held small casks of various oils, obtained for Popinot on commission by the devoted Gaudissart. The ledgers, the accounts, and the desks were moved into the rooms above the shop and the back-shop. An old cook did all the household work for the master and his three clerks. Popinot, penned up in a corner of

the shop closed in with glass, might be seen in a serge apron and long sleeves of green linen, with a pen behind his ear, in the midst of a mass of papers, where in fact Birotteau now found him, as he was overhauling his letters full of proposals and checks and orders. At the words "Hey, my boy!" uttered by his old master, Popinot raised his head, locked up his cubby-hole, and came forward with a joyous air and the end of his nose a little red. There was no fire in the shop, and the door was always open.

"I feared you were never coming," he said respectfully.

The clerks crowded round to look at the distinguished perfumer, the decorated deputy-mayor, the partner of their own master. Birotteau, so pitifully small at the Kellers, felt a craving to imitate those magnates; he stroked his chin, rose on his heels with native self-complacency, and talked his usual platitudes.

"Hey, my lad! we get up early, don't we?" he remarked.

"No, for we don't always go to bed," said Popinot. "We must clutch success."

"What did I tell you? My oil will make your fortune!"

"Yes, monsieur. But the means employed to sell it count for something. I have set your diamond well."

"How do we stand?" said César. "How far have you got? What are the profits?"

"Profits! at the end of two months! How can you expect it? Friend Gaudissart has only been on the road for twenty-five days; he took a post-chaise without saying a word to me. Oh, he is devoted! We owe a

great deal to my uncle. The newspapers alone (here he whispered in Birotteau's ear) will cost us twelve thousand francs."

"Newspapers!" exclaimed the deputy-mayor.

"Have n't you read them?"

"No."

"Then you know nothing," said Popinot. "Twenty thousand francs worth of placards, gilt frames, copies of the prospectus. One hundred thousand bottles bought. Ah, it is all paying through the nose at this moment! We are manufacturing on a grand scale. If you had set foot in the faubourg, where I often work all night, you would have seen a little nut-cracker which is n't to be sneezed at, I can tell you. On my own account, I have made, in the last five days, not less than ten thousand francs, merely by commissions on the sale of druggists' oils."

"What a capable head!" said Birotteau, laying his hand on little Popinot's thick hair and rubbing it about as if he were a baby. "I found it out."

Several persons here came in.

"On Sunday we dine at your aunt Ragon's," added César, leaving Popinot to go on with his business, for he perceived that the fresh meat he had come to taste was not yet cut up.

"It is amazing! A clerk becomes a merchant in twenty-four hours," thought Birotteau, who understood the happiness and self-assurance of Anselme as little as the dandy luxury of du Tillet. "Anselme put on a little stiff air when I patted him on the head, just as if he were François Keller himself."

Birotteau never once reflected that the clerks were

looking on, and that the master of the establishment had his dignity to preserve. In this instance, as in the case of his speech to du Tillet, the worthy soul committed a folly out of pure goodness of heart, and for lack of knowing how to withhold an honest sentiment vulgarly expressed. By this trifling act César would have wounded irretrievably any other man than little Popinot.

The Sunday dinner at the Ragon's was destined to be the last pleasure of the nineteen happy years of the Birotteau household, — years of happiness that were full to overflowing. Ragon lived in the Rue du Petit-Bourbon-Saint-Sulpice, on the second floor of a dignified old house, in an appartement decorated with large panels where painted shepherdesses danced in panniers, before whom fed the sheep of our nineteenth century, the sober and serious bourgeoisie, — whose comical demeanor, with their respectful notions about the nobility, and their devotion to the Sovereign and the Church, were all admirably represented by Ragon himself. The furniture, the clocks, linen, dinner-service, all seemed patriarchal; novel in form because of their very age. The salon, hung with old damask and draped with curtains in brocatelle, contained portraits of duchesses and other royalist tributes; also a superb Popinot, sheriff of Sancerre, painted by Latour, — the father of Madame Ragon, a worthy, excellent man, in a picture out of which he smiled like a parvenu in all his glory. When at home, Madame Ragon completed her natural self with a little King Charles spaniel, which presented a surprisingly harmonious effect as it lay on the hard

little sofa, rococo in shape, that assuredly never played the part assigned to the sofa of Crébillon.

Among their many virtues, the Ragons were noted for the possession of old wines which had come to perfect mellowness, and for certain of Madame Anfoux's liqueurs, which certain persons, obstinately (though it was said hopelessly) bent on making love to Madame Ragon, had brought her from the West Indies. Thus their little dinners were much prized. Jeannette, the old cook, took care of the aged couple with blind devotion: she would have stolen the fruit to make their sweetmeats. Instead of taking her money to the savings-bank, she put it judiciously into lotteries, hoping that some day she could bestow a good round sum on her master and mistress. On the appointed Sundays when they received their guests, she was, despite her years, active in the kitchen to superintend the dishes, which she served at the table with an agility that (to use a favorite expression of the worthy Ragon) might have given points to Mademoiselle Contat when she played Susanne in the "Mariage de Figaro."

The guests on this occasion were Popinot the judge, Pillerault, Anselme, the three Birotteaus, three Matifats, and the Abbé Loraux. Madame Matifat, whom we lately met crowned with a turban for the ball, now wore a gown of blue velvet, with coarse cotton stockings, leather shoes, gloves of chamois-skin with a border of green plush, and a bonnet lined with pink, filled in with white puffs about the face. These ten personages assembled at five o'clock. The old Ragons always requested their guests to be punctual. When this worthy couple were invited out, their hosts always

put the dinner at the same hour, remembering that stomachs which were sixty-five years old could not adapt themselves to the novel hours recently adopted in the great world.

Césarine was sure that Madame Ragon would place her beside Anselme; for all women, be they fools or saints, know what is what in love. The daughter of "The Queen of Roses" therefore dressed with the intention of turning Popinot's head. Her mother — having renounced, not without pain, the thought of marrying her to Crottat, who to her eyes played the part of heir-apparent — assisted, with some bitter thoughts, at the toilet. Maternal forethought lowered the modest gauzy neckerchief to show a little of Césarine's shoulders and the spring of her graceful throat, which was remarkably elegant. The Grecian bodice, crossed from left to right with five folds, opened slightly, showing delicious curves; the gray merino dress with green furbelows defined the pretty waist, which had never looked so slender nor so supple. She wore earrings of gold fret-work, and her hair, gathered up *à la chinoise*, let the eye take in the soft freshness of a skin traced with blue veins, where the light shone chastely on the pure white tones. Césarine was so coquettishly lovely that Madame Matifat could not help admitting it, without, however, perceiving that mother and daughter had the one purpose of bewitching Anselme.

Neither Birotteau, his wife, Madame Matifat nor any of the others disturbed the sweet converse which the young people, thrilling with love, held in whispering voices within the embrasure of a window, through whose chinks the north wind blew its chilly whistle. The con-

versation of the elders became animated when Popinot the judge let fall a word about Roguin's flight, remarking that he was the second notary who had absconded, — a crime formerly unknown. Madame Ragon, at the word Roguin, touched her brother's foot, Pillerault spoke loudly to drown his voice, and both made him a sign to remember Madame Birotteau.

"I know all," said Constance in a low, pained voice.

"Well, then," said Madame Matifat to Birotteau, who humbly bowed his head, "how much did he carry off? If we are to believe the gossips, you are ruined."

"He had two hundred thousand francs of mine," said César. "As to the forty thousand he pretended to make me borrow from one of his clients, whose property he had already squandered, I am now bringing a suit to recover them."

"The case will be decided this week," said Popinot. "I thought you would not be unwilling that I should explain your situation to Monsieur le président; he has ordered that all Roguin's papers be submitted to the custody of the court, so as to ascertain the exact time when Roguin made away with the funds of his client, and thus verify the facts alleged by Derville, who made the argument himself to save you the expense."

"Shall we win?" asked Madame Birotteau.

"I don't know," answered Popinot. "Though I belong to the court in which the suit is brought, I shall abstain from giving an opinion, even if called upon."

"Can there be any doubt in such a simple case?" said Pillerault. "Such deeds make mention that payment has been made, and notaries are obliged to declare that they have seen the money passed from the lender

to the borrower. Roguin would be sent to the galleys if the law could get hold of him."

"According to my idea," said the judge, "the lender ought to have sued Roguin for the costs and the caution-money; but it sometimes happens at the Cour Royale that in matters even more plain than this the judges stand six against six."

"Mademoiselle, what are they saying? Has Monsieur Roguin absconded?" said Anselme, hearing at last what was going on about him. "Monsieur said nothing of it to me, — to me who would shed my blood for him —"

Césarine fully understood that the whole family were included in the "for him;" for if the innocent girl could mistake the accent, she could not misunderstand the glance, which wrapped her, as it were, in a rosy flame.

"I know you would; I told him so. He hid everything from my mother, and confided only in me."

"You spoke to him of me?" said Popinot; "you have read my heart? Have you read all that is there?"

"Perhaps."

"I am very happy," said Popinot. "If you would lighten all my fears — in a year I shall be so prosperous that your father cannot object when I speak to him of our marriage. From henceforth I will sleep only five hours a night."

"Do not injure yourself," said Césarine, with an inexpressible accent and a look in which Popinot was suffered to read her thoughts.

"Wife," said César, as they rose from table, "I think those young people love each other."

"Well, so much the better," said Constance, in a grave voice; "my daughter will be the wife of a man of sense and energy. Talent is the best dower a man can offer."

She left the room hastily and went to Madame Ragon's bedchamber. César during the dinner had made various fatuous remarks, which caused the judge and Pillerault to smile, and reminded the unhappy woman of how unfitted her poor husband was to grapple with misfortune. Her heart was full of tears; and she instinctively dreaded du Tillet, for every mother knows the *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*, even if she does not know Latin. Constance wept in the arms of Madame Ragon and her daughter, though she would not tell them the cause of her distress.

"I am nervous," she said.

The rest of the evening was spent by the elders at the card-table, and by the young people in those little games called innocent because they cover the innocent by-play of bourgeois love. The Matifats joined in these games.

"César," said Constance as they drove home, "go and see Monsieur le Baron de Nucingen on the 8th so as to be sure of having your payments ready in advance of the 15th. If there should be any hitch, how could you scrape the money together if you have only one day to do it in?"

"I will see to it, wife," said César, pressing his wife's hand and his daughter's, adding, "Ah, my dear white lambs, I have given you a sad New Year's gift!"

The two women, unable to see him in the obscurity of the hackney coach, felt his tears falling hot upon their hands.

"Be hopeful, dear friend," said Constance.

"All will go well, papa; Monsieur Anselme Popinot told me he would shed his blood for you."

"For me?" said César, trying to speak gayly; "and for the family as well. Is n't it so?"

Césarine pressed her father's hand, as if to let him know she was betrothed to Anselme.

IV.

During the first three days of the year, two hundred visiting cards were sent to Birotteau. This rush of fictitious friendship, these empty testimonials of favor, are horrible to those who feel themselves drawn down into the vortex of misfortune. Birotteau presented himself three times at the hôtel of the famous banker, the Baron de Nucingen, but in vain. The opening of the year with all its festivities sufficiently explained the absence of the financier. On the last occasion Birotteau got as far as the office of the banker, where the head-clerk, a German, told him that Monsieur de Nucingen had returned at five in the morning from a ball at the Kellers', and would not be visible until half-past nine o'clock. Birotteau had the luck to interest this man in his affairs, and remained talking with him more than half an hour. In the course of the afternoon this prime minister of the house of Nucingen wrote Birotteau that the baron would receive him the next day, 13th, at noon. Though every hour brought its drop of absinthe, the day went by with frightful rapidity. César took a hackney coach, but stopped it several paces distant from the hôtel, whose courtyard was crowded with carriages. The poor man's heart sank within him when he saw the splendors of that noted house.

"And yet he has failed twice," he said to himself as he went up a superb staircase banked with flowers, and

crossed the sumptuous rooms which helped to make Madame Delphine de Nucingen famous in the Chaussée d'Antin. The baronne's ambition was to rival the great ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to whose houses she was not as yet admitted. The baron was breakfasting with his wife. In spite of the crowd which was waiting for him in the counting-room, he had left word that any friend of du Tillet was to be admitted. Birotteau trembled with hope as he noticed the change which the baron's order had wrought in the hitherto insolent manner of the footman.

"Bardon me, my tear," said the baron to his wife, in a strong German accent, as he rose and nodded to Birotteau, "monsieur is a goot royalist, and der intimate frient of tu Tillet. Bezides, monsieur is debudy-mayor of der zecond arrondissement, and gifs palls of Aziatigue magnifissence; so vill you mak his acquentence mit blaysure."

"I should be delighted to take lessons from Madame Birotteau, for Ferdinand —"

"She calls him Ferdinand!" thought César.

— "spoke of the ball with great admiration, which is all the more valuable because he usually admires nothing. Ferdinand is a harsh critic; in his eyes everything ought to be perfect. Shall you soon give another ball?" she inquired affably.

"Madame, poor people, such as we are, seldom have many amusements of that kind," said the perfumer, not knowing whether she meant to ridicule him, or was merely paying an empty compliment.

"Monsieur Grindot suberintented der resdoration of your abbartement, I zink?" said the baron.

P. C. Jeanniot

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Procédé Goupil

"Ah, Grindot! that nice little architect who has just returned from Rome," said Delphine de Nucingen. "I dote on him; he makes delicious drawings in my album."

No culprit enduring the torments of hell in Venetian dungeons ever suffered more from the torture of the boot than Birotteau did, standing there in his ordinary clothes. He felt a sneer in every word.

"Vill you gif oder little palls?" said the banker, with a searching look at the perfumer. "You see all der vorld ist inderesded."

"Will Monsieur Birotteau breakfast with us, without ceremony?" said Delphine, motioning towards the table which was sumptuously served.

"Madame la baronne, I came on business, and I am —"

"Yes, matame, vill you bermit us to speak of business?"

Delphine made a little sign of assent, saying to her husband, "Are you going to buy perfumery?" The baron shrugged his shoulders and turned to César, who trembled with anxiety.

"Tu Tillet takes der graadest inderest in you," he said.

"At last," thought the poor man, "we are coming to the point."

"His ledder gif you in my house a creydit vich is only limided by der limids of my privade fortune."

The exhilarating balm infused into the water offered by the angel to Hagar in the desert, must have been the same cordial which flowed through César's veins as he listened to these words. The wily banker retained the horrible pronunciation of the German Jews, — possibly

that he might be able to deny promises actually given, but only half-understood.

"You shall haf a running aggont. Ve vill broceed in dis vay —" said this great and good and venerable financier, with Alsatian good-humor.

Birotteau doubted no longer; he was a merchant, and knew very well that those who have no intention of rendering a service never enter into the details of executing it.

"I neet not tell you dat der Bank demands of all, graat and small alaike, dree zignatures. So denn, you traw a cheque to die order of our frient tu Tillet, and I vill sent it, same tay, to der Bank mit mein zignature; so shall you haf, at four o'clock, der amount of die cheque you trew in der morning; and at der costs of die Bank. I vill not receif a commission, no! I vill haf only der blaysure to be agreeaple to you. But I mak one condeetion," he added, laying his left finger lightly on his nose with an inimitably sly gesture.

"Monsieur le baron, it is granted on the spot," said Birotteau, who thought it concerned some tithe to be levied on his profits.

"A condeetion to vich I attache der graatest imbortance, because I vish Matame de Nucingen should receif, as she say, zom lessons from Matame Pirôdôt."

"Monsieur le baron! pray do not laugh at me, I entreat you."

"Monsieur Pirôdôt," said the financier, with a serious air, "it is denn agreet; you vill invite us to your nex pall? My vife is shalous; she vish to see your abbartement, of vich she hear so mooch."

"Monsieur le baron! —"

"Oh! if you reffuse me, no creydit! Yes, I know der Prayfic of die Seine was at your las pall."

"Monsieur le baron!—"

"You had Pillartière, shentelman of der betchamber; goot royalist like you, who vas vounded at Zaint-Roqque—"

"On the 13th Vendémiaire, Monsieur le baron."

"Denn you hat Monsieur de Lazabed, Monsieur Fauquelin of der Agatemi—"

"Monsieur le baron!—"

"Hey! der tefle! dont pe zo humple, Monsieur der debudy-mayor; I haf heard dat der king say dat your pall—"

"The king?" exclaimed Birotteau, who was destined to hear no more, for, at this moment, a young man entered the room familiarly, whose step, recognized from afar by the beautiful Delphine de Nucingen, brought the color to her cheek.

"Goot morning, my tear te Marsay; tak my blace. Dere is a crowd, zey tell me, waiting in der gounting-room. I know vy. Der mines of Wortschin bay a graat divitent! I haf receifed die aggonts. You vill haf one hundert tousant francs, Matame de Nucingen, so can you buy chewels and oder tings to make you bretty, — as if you could be brettier!"

"Good God! the Ragons sold their shares!" exclaimed Birotteau.

"Who are those persons?" asked the elegant de Marsay, smiling.

"Egzactly," said Monsieur de Nucingen, turning back when he was almost at the door. "I zink dat dose persons — te Marsay, dis is Monsieur Pirôdôt,

your berfumer, who gifs palls of a magnifissence druly Aziatigue, and whom der king has decoraded."

De Marsay lifted his eyeglass, and said, "Ah! true, I thought the face was not unknown to me. So you are going to perfume your affairs with potent cosmetics, oil them with —"

"Ah! dose Rakkons," interrupted the baron, making a grimace expressive of disgust; "dey had an aggont mit us; I fafored dem, and dey could haf made der fortune, but dey would not wait one zingle day longer."

"Monsieur le baron!" cried Birotteau.

The worthy man thought his own prospects extremely doubtful, and without bowing to Madame de Nucingen, or to de Marsay, he hastily followed the banker. The baron was already on the staircase, and Birotteau caught him at the bottom just as he was about to enter the counting-room. As Nucingen opened the door he saw the despairing gesture of the poor creature behind him, who felt himself pushed off into a gulf, and said hastily, —

"Vell, it is all agreet. See tu Tillet, and arranche it mit him."

Birotteau, thinking that de Marsay might have some influence with Nucingen, ran back with the rapidity of a swallow, and slipped into the dining-room where he had left the baronne and the young man, and where Delphine was waiting for a cup of *café à la crême*. He saw that the coffee had been served, but the baronne and the dandy had disappeared. The footman smiled at the astonishment of the worthy man, who slowly re-descended the stairs. César rushed to du Tillet's, and was told that he had gone into the country with Madame Roguin.

He took a cabriolet, and paid the driver well to be taken rapidly to Nogent-sur-Marne. At Nogent-sur-Marne the porter told him that monsieur and madame had started for Paris. Birotteau returned home, shattered in mind and body. When he related his wild-goose chase to his wife and daughter he was amazed to find his Constance, usually perched like a bird of ill omen on the smallest commercial mishap, now giving him the tenderest consolation, and assuring him that everything would turn out well.

The next morning, Birotteau mounted guard as early as seven o'clock before du Tillet's door. He begged the porter, slipping ten francs into his hand, to put him in communication with du Tillet's valet, and obtained from the latter a promise to show him in to his master the moment that du Tillet was visible: he slid two pieces of gold into the valet's hand. By such little sacrifices and great humiliations, common to all courtiers and petitioners, he was able to attain his end. At half-past eight, just as his former clerk was putting on a dressing-gown, yawning, stretching, and shaking off the cobwebs of sleep, Birotteau came face to face with the tiger, hungry for revenge, whom he now looked upon as his only friend.

"Go on with your dressing," said Birotteau.

"What do you want, *my good César?*" said du Tillet.

César stated, with painful trepidation, the answer and requirements of Monsieur de Nucingen to the inattentive ears of du Tillet, who was looking for the bellows and scolding his valet for the clumsy manner in which he had lighted the fire.

The valet listened. At first César did not notice him; when he did so he stopped short, confused, but resumed what he was saying as du Tillet touched him with the spur exclaiming, "Go on! go on! I am listening to you."

The poor man's shirt was wet; his perspiration turned to ice as du Tillet looked fixedly at him, and he saw the silver-lined pupils of those eyes, streaked with threads of gold, which pierced to his very heart with a diabolical gleam.

"My dear master, the Bank has refused to take your notes which the house of Claparon passed over to Gigonnet *not guaranteed.* Is that my fault? How is it that you, an old commercial judge, could commit such blunders? I am, first and foremost, a banker. I will give you my money, but I cannot risk having my signature refused at the Bank. My credit is my life; that is the case with all of us. Do you want money?"

"Can you give me all I want?"

"That depends on how much you owe. How much do you want?"

"Thirty thousand francs."

"Are the chimney-bricks coming down on my head?" exclaimed du Tillet, bursting into a laugh.

César, misled by the luxury about him, fancied it was the laugh of a man to whom the sum was a mere trifle; he breathed again. Du Tillet rang the bell.

"Send the cashier to me."

"He has not come, monsieur," said the valet.

"These fellows take advantage of me! It is half-past eight o'clock, and he ought to have done a million francs' worth of business by this time."

Five minutes later Monsieur Legras came in.

"How much have we in the desk?"

"Only twenty thousand francs. Monsieur gave orders to buy into the Funds to the amount of thirty thousand francs cash, payable on the 15th."

"That 's true; I am half-asleep still."

The cashier gave Birotteau a suspicious look as he left the room.

"If truth were banished from this earth, she would leave her last word with a cashier," said du Tillet. "Have n't you some interest with little Popinot, who has set up for himself?" he added, after a dreadful pause, in which the sweat rolled in drops from César's brow.

"Yes," he answered naïvely. "Do you think you could discount his signature for a large amount?"

"Bring me his acceptances for fifty thousand francs, and I will get them discounted for you at a reasonable rate by old Gobseck, who is very easy to deal with when he has funds to invest; and he has some now."

Birotteau went home broken-hearted, not perceiving that the bankers were tossing him from one to the other like a shuttle-cock; but Constance had already guessed that credit was unattainable. If three bankers refused it, it was very certain that they had inquired of each other about so prominent a man as a deputy-mayor; and there was, consequently, no hope from the Bank of France.

"Try to renew your notes," she said; "go and see Monsieur Claparon, your copartner, and all the others to whom you gave notes for the 15th, and ask them to renew. It will be time enough to go to the money-lenders with Popinot's paper if that fails."

"To-morrow is the 13th," said Birotteau, completely crushed.

In the language of his own prospectus, he enjoyed a sanguine temperament, which was subject to an enormous waste through emotions and the pressure of thought, and imperatively demanded sleep to repair it. Césarine took her father into the salon and played to him "Rousseau's Dream," — a pretty piece of music by Hérold; while Constance sat sewing beside him. The poor man laid his head on a cushion, and every time he looked up at his wife he saw a soft smile upon her lips; and thus he fell asleep.

"Poor man!" said Constance; "what misery is in store for him! God grant he may have strength to bear it!"

"Oh! what troubles you, mamma?" said Césarine, seeing that her mother was weeping.

"Dear daughter, I see a failure coming. If your father is forced to make an assignment, we must ask no one's pity. My child, be prepared to become a simple shop-girl. If I see you accepting your life courageously, I shall have strength to begin my life over again. I know your father, — he will not keep back one farthing; I shall resign my dower; all that we possess will be sold. My child, you must take your jewels and your clothes to-morrow to your uncle Pillerault; for you are not bound to any sacrifice."

Césarine was seized with a terror beyond control as she listened to these words, spoken with religious simplicity. The thought came into her mind to go and see Anselme; but her native delicacy checked it.

On the morrow, at nine o'clock, Birotteau, following

his wife's advice, went to find Claparon in the Rue de Provence, in the grasp of anxieties quite other than those through which he had lately passed. To ask for a credit is an ordinary business matter; it happens every day that those who undertake an enterprise are obliged to borrow capital; but to ask for the renewal of notes is in commercial jurisprudence what the correctional police is to the court of assizes, — a first step toward bankruptcy, just as a misdemeanor leads to crime. The secret of your embarrassment is in other hands than your own. A merchant delivers himself over, bound hand and foot, to another merchant; and mercy is a virtue not practised at the Bourse.

César, who once walked the streets of Paris with his head high and his eye beaming with confidence, now, unstrung by perplexity, shrank from meeting Claparon; he began to realize that a banker's heart is mere viscera. Claparon had seemed to him so brutal in his coarse jollity, and he had felt the man's vulgarity so keenly, that he shuddered at the necessity of accosting him.

"But he is nearer to the people; perhaps he will therefore have more heart!" Such was the first reproachful word which the anguish of his position forced from César's lips.

Birotteau drew upon the dregs of his courage, and went up the stairway of a mean little *entresol*, at whose windows he had caught a glimpse of green curtains yellowed by the sun. He read the word "Offices," stamped in black letters on an oval copper-plate; he rapped, nobody answered, and he went in. The place, worse than humble, conveyed an idea of penury, or avarice,

or neglect. No employé was to be seen behind the brass lattice which topped an unpainted white wooden enclosure, breast-high, within which were tables and desks in stained black wood. These deserted places were littered with inkstands, in which the ink was mouldy and the pens as rumpled as a ragamuffin's head, and twisted like a sunfish ; with boxes and papers and printed matter, — all worthless, no doubt. The floor was as dirty, defaced, and damp as that of a boarding-house. The second room, announced by the word "Counting-Room" on its door, harmonized with the grim *facetiæ* of its neighbor. In one corner was a large space screened off by an oak balustrade, trellised with copper wire and furnished with a sliding cat-hole, within which was an enormous iron chest. This space, apparently given over to the rioting of rats, also contained an odd-looking desk, with a shabby arm-chair, which was ragged, green, and torn in the seat, — from which the horse-hair protruded, like the wig of its master, in half a hundred libertine curls. The chief adornment of this room, which had evidently been the salon of the appartement before it was converted into a banking-office, was a round table covered with a green cloth, round which stood a few old chairs of black leather with tarnished gilt nails. The fireplace, somewhat elegant, showed none of the sooty marks of a fire ; the hearth was clean ; the mirror, covered with fly-specks, had a paltry air, in keeping with a mahogany clock bought at the sale of some old notary, which annoyed the eye, already depressed by two candelabras without candles and the sticky dust that covered them. The wall-paper, mouse-gray with a pink border,

revealed, by certain fuliginous stains, the unwholesome presence of smokers. Nothing ever more faithfully represented that prosaic precinct called by the newspapers an "editorial sanctum." Birotteau, fearing that he might be indiscreet, knocked sharply three times on the door opposite to that by which he entered.

"Come in!" cried Claparon, the reverberation of whose voice revealed the distance it had to traverse and the emptiness of the room, — in which César heard the crackling of a good fire, though the owner was apparently not there.

The room was, in truth, Claparon's private office. Between the ostentatious reception-room of François Keller and the untidy abode of the counterfeit banker, there was all the difference that exists between Versailles and the wigwam of a Huron chief. Birotteau had witnessed the splendors of finance; he was now to see its fooleries. Lying in bed, in a sort of oblong recess or den opening from the farther end of the office, and where the habits of a slovenly life had spoiled, dirtied, greased, torn, defaced, obliterated, and ruined furniture which had been elegant in its day, Claparon, at the entrance of Birotteau, wrapped his filthy dressing-gown around him, laid down his pipe, and drew together the curtains of the bed with a haste which made even the innocent perfumer suspect his morals.

"Sit down, monsieur," said the make-believe banker.

Claparon, without his wig, his head wrapped up in a bandanna handkerchief twisted awry, seemed all the more hideous to Birotteau because, when the dressing-gown gaped open, he saw an undershirt of knitted wool.

once white, but now yellowed by wear indefinitely prolonged.

"Will you breakfast with me?" said Claparon, recollecting the perfumer's ball, and thinking to make him a return and also to put him off the secret by this invitation.

César now perceived a round table, hastily cleared of its litter, which bore testimony to the presence of jovial company by a pâté, oysters, white wine, and vulgar kidneys, *sautés au vin de champagne*, sodden in their own sauce. The light of a charcoal brazier gleamed on an *omelette aux truffes*.

Two covers and two napkins, soiled by the supper of the previous night, might have enlightened the purest innocence. Claparon, thinking himself very clever, pressed his invitation in spite of César's refusal.

"I was to have had a guest, but that guest has disappointed me," said the crafty traveller, in a voice likely to reach a person buried under coverlets.

"Monsieur," said Birotteau, "I came solely on business, and I shall not detain you long."

"I'm used up," said Claparon, pointing to the desk and the tables piled with documents; "they don't leave me a poor miserable moment to myself! I don't receive people except on Saturdays. But as for you, my dear friend, I'll see you at any time. I have n't a moment to love or to loaf; I have lost even the inspiration of business; to catch its vim one must have the sloth of ease. Nobody ever sees me now on the boulevard doing nothing. Bah! I'm sick of business; I don't want to talk about business; I've got money enough, but I never can get enough happiness. My gracious!

I want to travel, — to see Italy! Oh, that dear Italy! beautiful in spite of all her reverses! adorable land, where I shall no doubt encounter some angel, complying yet majestic! I have always loved Italian women. Did you ever have an Italian woman yourself? No? Then come with me to Italy. We will see Venice, the abode of doges, — unfortunately fallen into those intelligent Austrian hands that know nothing of art! Bah! let us get rid of business, canals, loans, and peaceful governments. I'm a good fellow when I've got my pockets lined. Thunder! let's travel."

"One word, monsieur, and I will release you," said Birotteau. "You made over my notes to Monsieur Bidault."

"You mean Gigonnet, that good little Gigonnet, easy-going —"

"Yes," said César; "but I wish, — and here I count upon your honor and delicacy, —"

Claparon bowed.

"— to renew those notes."

"Impossible!" snapped the banker. "I'm not alone in the matter. We have met in council, — regular Chamber; but we all agreed like bacon in a frying-pan. The devil! we deliberated. Those lands about the Madeleine don't amount to anything; we are operating elsewhere. Hey! my dear sir, if we were not involved in the Champs Élysées and at the Bourse which they are going to finish, and in the quartier Saint-Lazare and at Tivoli, we should n't be, as that fat Nucingen says, in *peaseness* at all. What's the Madeleine to us? — a midge of a thing. Pr-r-r! We don't play low, my good fellow," he said, tapping

Birotteau on the stomach and catching him round the waist. "Come, let's have our breakfast, and talk," added Claparon, wishing to soften his refusal.

"Very good," said Birotteau. "So much the worse for the other guest," he thought, meaning to make Claparon drunk, and to find out who were his real associates in an affair which began to look suspicious to him.

"All right! Victoire!" called the banker.

This call brought a regular Léonarde, tricked out like a fish-woman.

"Tell the clerks that I can't see any one, — not even Nucingen, Keller, Gigonnet, and all the rest of them."

"No one has come but Monsieur Lempereur."

"He can receive the great people," said Claparon; "the small fry are not to get beyond the first room. They are to say I'm cogitating a great enterprise — in champagne."

To make an old commercial traveller drunk is an impossibility. César mistook the elation of the man's vulgarity when he attempted to sound his mind.

"That infamous Roguin is still connected with you," he began; "don't you think you ought to write and tell him to assist an old friend whom he has compromised, — a man with whom he dined every Sunday, and whom he has known for twenty years?"

"Roguin? A fool! his share is ours now. Don't be worried, old fellow, all will go well. Pay up on the 15th, and after that we will see — I say, we will see. Another glass of wine? The capital does n't concern me one atom; pay or don't pay, I sha' n't make faces at you. I'm only in the business for a commission on the sales, and for a share when the lands are converted into

money; and it's for that I manage the owners. Don't you understand? You have got solid men behind you, so I'm not afraid, my good sir. Nowadays, business is all parcelled out in portions. A single enterprise requires a combination of capacities. Go in with us; don't potter with pomatum and perfumes, — rubbish! rubbish! Shave the public; speculate!"

"Speculation!" said César, "is that commerce?"

"It is abstract commerce," said Claparon, — "commerce which won't be developed for ten years to come, according to Nucingen, the Napoleon of finance; commerce by which a man can grasp the totality of fractions, and skim the profits before there are any. Gigantic idea! one way of pouring hope into pint cups, — in short, a new necromancy! So far, we have only got ten or a dozen hard heads initiated into the cabalistic secrets of these magnificent combinations."

César opened his eyes and ears, endeavoring to understand this composite phraseology.

"Listen," said Claparon, after a pause. "Such master-strokes need men. There's the man of genius who has n't a sou — like all men of genius. Those fellows spend their thoughts and spend their money just as it comes. Imagine a pig rooting round a truffle-patch; he is followed by a jolly fellow, a moneyed man, who listens for the grunt as piggy finds the succulent. Now, when the man of genius has found a good thing, the moneyed man taps him on the shoulder and says, 'What have you got there? You are rushing into the fiery furnace, my good fellow, and you have n't the loins to run out again. There's a thousand francs; just let me take it in hand and manage the affair.' Very good!

The banker then convokes the traders: 'My friends, let us go to work: write a prospectus! Down with humbug!' On that they get out the hunting-horns and shout and clamor, — 'One hundred thousand francs for five sous! or five sous for a hundred thousand francs! gold mines! coal mines!' In short, all the clap-trap of commerce. We buy up men of arts and sciences; the show begins, the public enters; it gets its money's worth, and we get the profits. The pig is penned up with his potatoes, and the rest of us wallow in bank-notes. There it all is, my good sir. Come, go into the business with us. What would you like to be, — pig, buzzard, clown, or millionnaire? Reflect upon it; I have now laid before you the whole theory of the modern loan-system. Come and see me often; you 'll always find me a jovial, jolly fellow. French joviality — gayety and gravity, all in one — never injures business; quite the contrary. Men who quaff the sparkling cup are born to understand each other. Come, another glass of champagne! it is good, I tell you! It was sent to me from Epernay itself, by a man for whom I once sold quantities at a good price — I used to be in wines. He shows his gratitude, and remembers me in my prosperity; very rare, that."

Birotteau, overcome by the frivolity and heedlessness of a man to whom the world attributed extreme depth and capacity, dared not question him any further. In the midst of his own haziness of mind produced by the champagne, he did, however, recollect a name spoken by du Tillet; and he asked Claparon who Gobseck the banker was, and where he lived.

"Have you got as far as that?" said Claparon.

"Gobseck is a banker, just as the headsman is a doctor. The first word is 'fifty per cent;' he belongs to the race of Harpagon; he'll take canary birds at all seasons, fur tippets in summer, nankeens in winter. What securities are you going to offer him? If you want him to take your paper without security you will have to deposit your wife, your daughter, your umbrella, everything down to your hat-box, your socks (don't you go in for ribbed socks?), your shovel and tongs, and the very wood you've got in the cellar! Gobseck! Gobseck! in the name of virtuous folly, who told you to go to that commercial guillotine?"

"Monsieur du Tillet."

"Ah! the scoundrel, I recognize him! We used to be friends. If we have quarrelled so that we don't speak to each other, you may depend upon it my aversion to him is well-founded; he let me read down to the bottom of his infamous soul, and he made me uncomfortable at that beautiful ball you gave us. I can't stand his impudent airs — all because he has got a notary's wife! I could have countesses if I wanted them; I sha' n't respect him any the more for that. Ah! my respect is a princess who'll never give birth to such as he. But, I say, you are a funny fellow, old man, to flash us a ball like that, and two months after try to renew your paper! You seem to have some go in you. Let's do business together. You have got a reputation which would be very useful to me. Oh! du Tillet was born to understand Gobseck. Du Tillet will come to a bad end at the Bourse. If he is, as they say, the tool of old Gobseck, he won't be allowed to go far. Gobseck sits in a corner of his web like an old spider who has

travelled round the world. Sooner or later, ztit! the usurer will toss him off as I do this glass of wine. So much the better! Du Tillet has played me a trick — oh! a damnable trick."

At the end of an hour and a half spent in just such senseless chatter, Birotteau attempted to get away, seeing that the late commercial traveller was about to relate the adventure of a republican deputy of Marseilles, in love with a certain actress then playing the part of la belle Arsène, who, on one occasion, was hissed by a royalist crowd in the pit.

"He stood up in his box," said Claparon, "and shouted: 'Arrest whoever hissed her! Eugh! If it's a woman, I'll kiss her; if it is a man, we'll see about it; if it's neither the one nor the other, may God's lightning blast it!' Guess how it ended."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Birotteau.

"You will have to come and see me," said Claparon; "that first scrap of paper you gave Cayron has come back to us protested; I indorsed it, so I've paid it. I shall send after you; business before everything."

Birotteau felt stabbed to the heart by this cold and grinning kindness as much as by the harshness of Keller or the coarse German banter of Nucingen. The familiarity of the man, and his grotesque gabble excited by champagne, seemed to tarnish the soul of the honest bourgeois as though he came from a house of financial ill-fame. He went down the stairway and found himself in the streets without knowing where he was going. As he walked along the boulevards and reached the Rue Saint-Denis, he recollected Molineux, and turned into

the Cour Batave. He went up the dirty, tortuous staircase which he once trod so proudly. He recalled to mind the mean and niggardly acrimony of Molineux, and he shrank from imploring his favor. The landlord was sitting in the chimney-corner, as on the occasion of César's first visit, but his breakfast was now in process of digestion. Birotteau proffered his request.

"Renew a note for twelve hundred francs?" said Molineux, with mocking incredulity. "Have you got to that, monsieur? If you have not twelve hundred francs to pay me on the 15th, do you intend to send back my receipt for the rent unpaid? I shall be sorry; but I have not the smallest civility in money-matters, — my rents are my living. Without them how could I pay what I owe myself? No merchant will deny the soundness of that principle. Money is no respecter of persons; money has no ears, it has no heart. The winter is hard, the price of wood has gone up. If you don't pay me on the 15th, a little summons will be served upon you at twelve o'clock on the 16th. Bah! the worthy Mitral, your bailiff, is mine as well; he will send you the writ in an envelope, with all the consideration due to your high position."

"Monsieur, I have never received a summons in my life," said Birotteau.

"There is a beginning to everything," said Molineux.

Dismayed by the curt malevolence of the old man, César was cowed; he heard the knell of failure ringing in his ears, and every jangle woke a memory of the stern sayings his pitiless justice had uttered against bankrupts. His former opinions now seared, as with fire, the soft substance of his brain.

"By the by," said Molineux, "you neglected to put upon your notes, 'for value received in rental,' which would secure me preference."

"My position will prevent me from doing anything to the detriment of my creditors," said César, stunned by the sudden sight of the precipice yawning before him.

"Very good, monsieur, very good; I thought I knew everything relating to rentals and tenants, but I have learned through you never to take notes in payment. Ah! I shall sue you, for your answer shows plainly enough that you are not going to meet your liabilities. Hard cash is a matter which concerns every landlord in Paris."

Birotteau went out, weary of life. It is in the nature of such soft and tender souls to be disheartened by a first rebuff, just as a first success encourages them. César no longer had any hope except in the devotion of little Popinot, to whom his thoughts naturally turned as he crossed the Marché des Innocents.

"Poor boy! who could have believed it when I launched him, only six weeks ago, in the Tuileries?"

It was just four o'clock, the hour at which the judges left their court-rooms. Popinot the elder chanced to go and see his nephew. This judge, whose mind was singularly acute on all moral questions, was also gifted with a second-sight which enabled him to discover secret intentions, to perceive the meaning of insignificant human actions, the germs of crime, the roots of wrong-doing; and he now watched Birotteau, though Birotteau was not aware of it. The perfumer, who was annoyed at finding the judge with his nephew, seemed to him

harassed, preoccupied, pensive. Little Popinot, always busy, with his pen behind his ear, lay down as usual flat on his stomach before the father of his Césarine. The empty phrases which César addressed to his partner seemed to the judge to mask some important request. Instead of going away, the crafty old man stayed in spite of his nephew's evident desire, for he guessed that the perfumer would soon try to get rid of him by going away himself. Accordingly, when Birotteau went out the judge followed, and saw Birotteau hanging about that part of the Rue des Cinq-Diamants which leads into the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher. This trifling circumstance roused the suspicions of old Popinot as to César's intentions; he turned into the Rue des Lombards, and when he saw the perfumer re-enter Anselme's door, he came hastily back again.

"My dear Popinot," said César to his partner, "I have come to ask a service of you."

"What can I do?" cried Popinot with generous ardor.

"Ah! you save my life," exclaimed the poor man, comforted by this warmth of heart which flamed upon the sea of ice he had traversed for twenty-five days.

"You must give me a note for fifty thousand francs on my share of the profits; we will arrange later about the payment."

Popinot looked fixedly at César. César dropped his eyes. At this moment the judge re-entered.

"My son — ah! excuse me, Monsieur Birotteau — Anselme, I forgot to tell you —" and with an imperious gesture he led his nephew into the street and forced him, in his shirt-sleeves and bareheaded, to listen as they

walked towards the Rue des Lombards. "My nephew, your old master may find himself so involved that he will be forced to make an assignment. Before taking that step, honorable men who have forty years of integrity to boast of, virtuous men seeking to save their good name, will play the part of reckless gamblers; they become capable of anything; they will sell their wives, traffic with their daughters, compromise their best friends, pawn what does not belong to them; they will frequent gambling-tables, become dissemblers, hypocrites, liars; they will even shed tears. I have witnessed strange things. You yourself have seen Roguin's respectability, — a man to whom they would have given the sacraments without confession. I do not apply these remarks in their full force to Monsieur Birotteau, — I believe him to be an honest man; but if he asks you to do anything, no matter what, against the rules of business, such as indorsing notes out of good-nature, or launching into a system of 'circulations,' which, to my mind, is the first step to swindling, — for it is uttering counterfeit paper-money, — if he asks you to do anything of the kind, promise me that you will sign nothing without consulting me. Remember that if you love his daughter you must not — in the very interests of your love you must not — destroy your future. If Monsieur Birotteau is to fall, what will it avail if you fall too? You will deprive yourselves, one as much as the other, of all the chances of your new business, which may prove his only refuge."

"Thank you, my uncle; a word to the wise is enough," said Popinot, to whom César's heart-rending exclamation was now explained.

The merchant in oils, refined and otherwise, returned to his gloomy shop with an anxious brow. Birotteau saw the change.

"Will you do me the honor to come up into my bedroom? We shall be better there. The clerks, though very busy, might overhear us."

Birotteau followed Popinot, a prey to the anxiety a condemned man goes through from the moment of his appeal for mercy until its rejection.

"My dear benefactor," said Anselme, "you cannot doubt my devotion; it is absolute. Permit me only to ask you one thing. Will this sum clear you entirely, or is it only a means of delaying some catastrophe? If it is that, what good will it do to drag me down also? You want notes at ninety days. Well, it is absolutely impossible that I could meet them in that time."

Birotteau rose, pale and solemn, and looked at Popinot.

Popinot, horror-struck, cried out, "I will do them for you, if you wish it."

"UNGRATEFUL!" said his master, who spent his whole remaining strength in hurling the word at Anselme's brow, as if it were a living mark of infamy.

Birotteau walked to the door, and went out. Popinot, rousing himself from the sensation which the terrible word produced upon him, rushed down the staircase and into the street, but Birotteau was out of sight. Césarine's lover heard that dreadful charge ringing in his ears, and saw the distorted face of the poor distracted César constantly before him; Popinot was to live henceforth, like Hamlet, with a spectre beside him.

Birotteau wandered about the streets of the neighbor

hood like a drunken man. At last he found himself upon the quay, and followed it till he reached Sèvres, where he passed the night at an inn, maddened with grief, while his terrified wife dared not send in search of him. She knew that in such circumstances an alarm, imprudently given, might be fatal to his credit, and the wise Constance sacrificed her own anxiety to her husband's commercial reputation: she waited silently through the night, mingling her prayers and terrors. Was César dead? Had he left Paris on the scent of some last hope? The next morning she behaved as though she knew the reasons for his absence; but at five o'clock in the afternoon when César had not returned, she sent for her uncle and begged him to go at once to the Morgue. During the whole of that day the courageous creature sat behind her counter, her daughter embroidering beside her. When Pillerault returned, César was with him; on his way back the old man had met him in the Palais-Royal, hesitating before the entrance to a gambling-house.

This was the 14th. At dinner César could not eat. His stomach, violently contracted, rejected food. The evening hours were terrible. The shaken man went through, for the hundredth time, one of those frightful alternations of hope and despair which, by forcing the soul to run up the scale of joyous emotion and then precipitating it to the last depths of agony, exhaust the vital strength of feeble beings. Derville, Birotteau's advocate, rushed into the handsome salon where Madame César was using all her persuasion to retain her husband, who wished to sleep on the fifth floor, — "that I may not see," he said, "these monuments of my folly."

"The suit is won!" cried Derville.

At these words César's drawn face relaxed; but his joy alarmed Derville and Pillerault. The women left the room to go and weep by themselves in Césarine's chamber.

"Now I can get a loan!" cried Birotteau.

"It would be imprudent," said Derville; "they have appealed; the court might reverse the judgment; but in a month it would be safe."

"A month!"

César fell into a sort of slumber, from which no one tried to rouse him, — a species of catalepsy, in which the body lived and suffered while the functions of the mind were in abeyance. This respite, bestowed by chance, was looked upon by Constance, Césarine, Pillerault, and Derville as a blessing from God. And they judged rightly: César was thus enabled to bear the harrowing emotions of that night. He was sitting in a corner of the sofa near the fire; his wife was in the other corner watching him attentively, with a soft smile upon her lips, — the smile which proves that women are nearer than men to the angelic nature, in that they know how to mingle an infinite tenderness with an all-embracing compassion; a secret belonging only to angels seen in dreams providentially strewn at long intervals through the history of human life. Césarine, sitting on a little stool at her mother's feet, touched her father's hand lightly with her hair from time to time, as she gave him a caress into which she strove to put the thoughts which, in such crises, the voice seems to render intrusive.

Seated in his arm-chair, like the Chancelier de l'Hôpital on the peristyle of the Chamber of Deputies, Pillerault

a philosopher prepared for all events, and showing upon his countenance the wisdom of an Egyptian sphinx — was talking to Derville and his niece in a suppressed voice. Constance thought it best to consult the lawyer, whose discretion was beyond a doubt. With the balance-sheet written in her head, she explained the whole situation in low tones. After an hour's conference, held in presence of the stupefied César, Derville shook his head and looked at Pillerault.

"Madame," he said, with the horrible coolness of his profession, "you must give in your schedule and make an assignment. Even supposing that by some contrivance you could meet the payments for to-morrow, you would have to pay down at least three hundred thousand francs before you could borrow on those lands. Your liabilities are five hundred thousand. To meet them you have assets that are very promising, very productive, but not convertible at present; you must fail within a given time. My opinion is that it is better to jump out of the window than to roll downstairs."

"That is my advice, too, dear child," said Pillerault.

Derville left, and Madame César and Pillerault went with him to the door.

"Poor father!" said Césarine, who rose softly to lay a kiss on César's head. "Then Anselme could do nothing?" she added, as her mother and Pillerault returned.

"UNGRATEFUL!" cried César, struck by the name of Anselme in the only living part of his memory, — as the note of a piano lifts the hammer which strikes its corresponding string.

V.

From the moment when that word "Ungrateful" was flung at him like an anathema, little Popinot had not had an hour's sleep nor an instant's peace of mind. The unhappy lad cursed his uncle, and finally went to see him. To get the better of that experienced judicial wisdom he poured forth the eloquence of love, hoping it might seduce a being from whose mind human speech slips like water from a duck's back, — a judge!

"From a commercial point of view," he said, "custom does allow the managing-partner to advance a certain sum to the sleeping-partner on the profits of the business, and we are certain to make profits. After close examination of my affairs I do feel strong enough to pay forty thousand francs in three months. The known integrity of Monsieur César is a guarantee that he will use that forty thousand to pay off his debts. Thus the creditors, if there should come a failure, can lay no blame on us. Besides, uncle, I would rather lose forty thousand francs than lose Césarine. At this very moment while I am speaking, she has doubtless been told of my refusal, and will cease to esteem me. I vowed my blood to my benefactor! I am like a young sailor who ought to sink with his captain, or a soldier who should die with his general."

"Good heart and bad merchant, you will never lose my esteem," said the judge, pressing the hand of his

nephew. "I have thought a great deal of this," he added. "I know you love Césarine devotedly, and I think you can satisfy the claims of love and the claims of commerce."

"Ah! my uncle, if you have found a way my honor is saved!"

"Advance Birotteau fifty thousand francs on his share in your oil, which has now become a species of property, reserving to yourself the right of buying it back. I will draw up the deed."

Anselme embraced his uncle and rushed home, made notes to the amount of fifty thousand francs, and ran from the Rue des Cinq-Diamants to the Place Vendôme, so that just as Césarine, her mother, and Pillerault were gazing at César, amazed at the sepulchral tone in which he had uttered the word "Ungrateful!" the door of the salon opened and Popinot appeared.

"My dear and beloved master!" he cried, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "here is what you asked of me!" He held out the notes. "Yes, I have carefully examined my situation; you need have no fear, I shall be able to pay them. Save — save your honor!"

"I was sure of him!" cried Césarine, seizing Popinot's hand, and pressing it with convulsive force.

Madame César embraced him; Birotteau rose up like the righteous at the sound of the last trump, and issued, as it were, from the tomb. Then he stretched out a frenzied hand to seize the fifty stamped papers.

"Stop!" said the terrible uncle Pillerault, snatching the papers from Popinot, "one moment!"

The four individuals present, — César, his wife, Césarine, and Popinot, — bewildered by the action of the old

man and by the tone of his voice, saw him tear the papers and fling them in the fire, without attempting to interfere.

"Uncle!"

"Uncle!"

"Uncle!"

"Monsieur!"

Four voices and but one heart; a startling unanimity! Uncle Pillerault passed his arm round Popinot's neck, held him to his breast, and kissed him.

"You are worthy of the love of those who have hearts," he said. "If you loved a daughter of mine, had she a million and you had nothing but that [pointing to the black ashes of the notes], you should marry her in a fortnight, if she loved you. Your master," he said, pointing to César, "is beside himself. My nephew," resumed Pillerault gravely, addressing the poor man, — "my nephew, away with illusions! We must do business with francs, not feelings. All this is noble, but useless. I spent two hours at the Bourse this afternoon; you have not one farthing's credit; every one is talking of your disaster, of your attempts to renew, of your appeals to various bankers, of their refusals, of your follies, — going up six flights of stairs to beg a gossiping landlord, who chatters like a magpie, to renew a note of twelve hundred francs! — your ball, given to conceal your embarrassments. They have gone so far as to say you had no property in Roguin's hands; according to your enemies, Roguin is only a blind. A friend of mine, whom I sent about to learn what is going on, confirms what I tell you. Every one foresees that Popinot will issue notes, and believes

that you set him up in business expressly as a last resource. In short, every calumny or slander which a man brings upon himself when he tries to mount a rung of the social ladder, is going the rounds among business men to-day. You might hawk about those notes of Popinot in vain; you would meet humiliating refusals; no one would take them; no one could be sure how many such notes you are issuing; every one expects you to sacrifice the poor lad to your own safety. You would destroy to no purpose the credit of the house of Popinot. Do you know how much the boldest money-lender would give you for those fifty thousand francs? Twenty thousand at the most; twenty thousand, do you hear me? There are crises in business when we must stand up three days before the world without eating, as if we had indigestion, and on the fourth we may be admitted to the larder of credit. You cannot live through those three days; and the whole matter lies there. My poor nephew, take courage! file your schedule, make an assignment. Here is Popinot, here am I; we will go to work as soon as the clerks have gone to bed, and spare you the agony of it."

"My uncle!" said César, clasping his hands.

"César, would you choose a shameful failure, in which there are no assets? Your share in the house of Popinot is all that saves your honor."

César, awakened by this last and fatal stream of light, saw at length the frightful truth in its full extent; he fell back upon the sofa, from thence to his knees, and his mind seemed to wander: he became like a little child. His wife thought he was dying. She knelt down to raise him, but joined her voice to his when

she saw him clasp his hands and lift his eyes, and recite, with resigned contrition, in the hearing of his uncle, his daughter, and Popinot, the sublime catholic prayer: —

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven; GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD; and forgive us our offences, as we forgive those who have offended against us. So be it!"

Tears came into the eyes of the stoic Pillerault; Césarine, overcome and weeping, leaned her head upon Popinot's shoulder, as he stood pale and rigid as a statue.

"Let us go below," said the old merchant, taking the arm of the young man.

It was half-past eleven when they left César to the care of his wife and daughter. Just at that moment Célestin, the head-clerk, to whom the management of the house had been left during this secret tumult, came up to the appartement and entered the salon. Hearing his step, Césarine ran to meet him, that he might not see the prostration of his master.

"Among the letters this evening there was one from Tours, which was misdirected and therefore delayed. I thought it might be from monsieur's brother, so I did not open it."

"Father!" cried Césarine; "a letter from my uncle at Tours!"

"Ah, I am saved!" cried César. "My brother! oh, my brother!" He kissed the letter, as he broke the seal, and read it aloud to his wife and danghter in a trembling voice: —

Answer of François to César Birotteau.

TOURS, 10th.

MY BELOVED BROTHER, — Your letter gave me the deepest pain. As soon as I had read it, I went at once and offered to God the holy sacrifice of the Mass, imploring him by the blood which his Son, our divine Redeemer, shed for us, to look with mercy upon your afflictions. At the moment when I offered the prayer *Pro meo fratre Cæsare*, my eyes were filled with tears as I thought of you, — from whom, unfortunately, I am separated in these days when you must sorely need the support of fraternal friendship. I have thought that the worthy and venerable Monsieur Pillerault would doubtless replace me. My dear César, never forget, in the midst of your troubles, that this life is a scene of trial, and is passing away; that one day we shall be rewarded for having suffered for the holy name of God, for his holy Church, for having followed the teachings of his Gospel and practised virtue. If it were otherwise, this world would have no meaning. I repeat to you these maxims though I know how good and pious you are, because it may happen that those who, like you, are flung into the storms of life upon the perilous waves of human interests might be tempted to utter blasphemies in the midst of their adversity, — carried away as they are by anguish. Curse neither the men who injure you nor the God who mingles, at his will, your joy with bitterness. Look not on life, but lift your eyes to heaven; there is comfort for the weak, there are riches for the poor, there are terrors for the —

"But, Birotteau," said his wife, "skip all that, and see what he sends us."

"We will read it over and over hereafter," said César, wiping his eyes and turning over the page, — letting fall, as he did so, a Treasury note. "I was

sure of him, poor brother!" said Birotteau, picking up the note and continuing to read, in a voice broken by tears.

I went to Madame de Listòmère, and without telling her the reason of my request I asked her to lend me all she could dispose of, so as to swell the amount of my savings. Her generosity has enabled me to make up a thousand francs; which I send herewith, in a note of the Receiver-General of Tours on the Treasury.

"A fine sum!" said Constance, looking at Césarine.

By retrenching a few superfluities in my life, I can return the four hundred francs Madame de Listomère has lent me in three years; so do not make yourself uneasy about them, my dear César. I send you all I have in the world; hoping that this sum may help you to a happy conclusion of your financial difficulties, which doubtless are only momentary. I well know your delicacy, and I wish to forestall your objections. Do not dream of paying me any interest for this money, nor of paying it back at all in the day of prosperity which ere long will dawn for you if God deigns to hear the prayers I offer to him daily. After I received your last letter, two years ago, I thought you so rich that I felt at liberty to spend my savings upon the poor; but now, all that I have is yours. When you have overcome this little commercial difficulty, keep the sum I now send for my niece Césarine; so that when she marries she may buy some trifle to remind her of her old uncle, who daily lifts his hands to heaven to implore the blessing of God upon her and all who are dear to her. And also, my dear César, recollect I am a poor priest who dwells, by the grace of God, like the larks in the meadow, in quiet places, trying to obey the commandment of our divine Saviour, and who consequently needs but little money. Therefore, do not have the least

scruple in the trying circumstances in which you find yourself; and think of me as one who loves you tenderly.

Our excellent Abbé Chapeloud, to whom I have not revealed your situation, desires me to convey his friendly regards to every member of your family, and his wishes for the continuance of your prosperity. Adieu, dear and well-beloved brother; I pray that at this painful juncture God will be pleased to preserve your health, and also that of your wife and daughter. I wish you, one and all, patience and courage under your afflictions.

FRANÇOIS BIROTTEAU,
Priest, Vicar of the Cathedral and Parochial Church of Saint-Gatien de Tours.

"A thousand francs!" cried Madame Birotteau.

"Put them away," said César gravely; "they are all he had. Besides, they belong to our daughter, and will enable us to live; so that we need ask nothing of our creditors."

"They will think you are abstracting large sums."

"Then I will show them the letter."

"They will think it a trick."

"My God! my God!" cried Birotteau. "I once thought thus of poor, unhappy people who were doubtless as I am now."

Terribly anxious about César's state, mother and daughter sat plying their needles by his side, in profound silence. At two in the morning Popinot gently opened the door of the salon and made a sign to Madame César to come down. On seeing his niece Pillerault took off his spectacles.

"My child, there is hope," he said; "all is not lost. But your husband could not bear the uncertainty of the negotiations which Anselme and I are about to under-

take. Don't leave your shop to-morrow, and take the addresses of all the bills; we have till four o'clock in the afternoon of the 15th. Here is my plan: Neither Ragon nor I am to be considered. Suppose that your hundred thousand francs deposited with Roguin had been remitted to the purchasers, you would not have them then any more than you have them now. The hundred and forty thousand francs for which notes were given to Claparon, and which must be paid in any state of the case, are what you have to meet. Therefore it is not Roguin's bankruptcy which has ruined you. I find, to meet your obligations, forty thousand francs which you can, sooner or later, borrow on your property in the Faubourg du Temple, and sixty thousand for your share in the house of Popinot. Thus you can make a struggle, for later you may borrow on the lands about the Madeleine. If your chief creditor agrees to help you, I shall not consider my interests; I shall sell out my Funds and live on dry bread; Popinot will get along between life and death, and as for you, you will be at the mercy of the smallest commercial mischance; but Cephalic Oil will undoubtedly make great returns. Popinot and I have consulted together; we will stand by you in this struggle. Ah! I shall eat my dry bread gayly if I see daylight breaking on the horizon. But everything depends on Gigonnet, who holds the notes, and the associates of Claparon. Popinot and I are going to see Gigonnet between seven and eight o'clock in the morning, and then we shall know what their intentions are."

Constance, wholly overcome, threw herself into her uncle's arms, voiceless except through tears and sobs

Neither Popinot nor Pillerault knew or could know that Bidault, called Gigonnet, and Claparon were du Tillet under two shapes; and that du Tillet was resolved to read in the "Journal des Petites Affiches" this terrible article; —

"Judgment of the Court of Commerce, which declares the Sieur César Birotteau, merchant-perfumer, living in Paris, Rue Saint-Honoré, no. 397, insolvent, and appoints the preliminary examination on the 17th of January, 1819. Commissioner, Monsieur Gobenheim-Keller. Agent, Monsieur Molineux."

Anselme and Pillerault examined César's affairs until daylight. At eight o'clock in the morning the two brave friends, — one an old soldier, the other a young recruit, who had never known, except by hearsay, the terrible anguish of those who commonly went up the staircase of Bidault called Gigonnet, — wended their way, without a word to each other, towards the Rue Grenétat. Both were suffering; from time to time Pillerault passed his hand across his brow.

The Rue Grenétat is a street where all the houses, crowded with trades of every kind, have a repulsive aspect. The buildings are horrible. The vile uncleanliness of manufactories is their leading feature. Old Gigonnet lived on the third floor of a house whose window-sashes, with small and very dirty panes, swung by the middle, on pivots. The staircase opened directly upon the street. The porter's lodge was on the *entresol*, in a space which was lighted only from the staircase. All the lodgers, with the exception of Gigonnet, worked at trades. Workmen were continually coming and going. The stairs were caked with a layer of mud,

hard or soft according to the state of the atmosphere, and were covered with filth. Each landing of this noisome stairway bore the names of the occupants in gilt letters on a metal plate, painted red and varnished, to which were attached specimens of their craft. As a rule, the doors stood open and gave to view queer combinations of the domestic household and the manufacturing operations. Strange cries and grunts issued therefrom, with songs and whistles and hisses that recalled the hour of four o'clock in the Jardin des Plantes. On the first floor, in an evil-smelling lair, the handsomest braces to be found in the *article-Paris* were made. On the second floor, the elegant boxes which adorn the shop-windows of the boulevards and the Palais-Royal at the beginning of the new year were manufactured, in the midst of the vilest filth. Gigonnet eventually died, worth eighteen hundred thousand francs, on the third floor of this house, from which no consideration could move him; though his niece, Madame Saillard, offered to give him an appartement in a hôtel in the Place Royale.

"Courage!" said Pillerault, as he pulled the deer's hoof hanging from the bell-rope of Gigonnet's clean gray door.

Gigonnet opened the door himself. César's two supporters, entering the precincts of bankruptcy, crossed the first room, which was clean and chilly and without curtains to its windows. All three sat down in the inner room where the money-lender lived, before a hearth full of ashes, in the midst of which the wood was successfully defending itself against the fire. Popinot's courage froze at sight of the usurer's green boxes and the monastic austerity of the room, whose atmosphere was

like that of a cellar. He looked with a wondering eye at the miserable blueish paper sprinkled with tricolor flowers, which had been on the walls for twenty-five years; and then his anxious glance fell upon the chimney-piece, ornamented with a clock shaped like a lyre, and two oval vases in Sèvres blue richly mounted in copper-gilt. This relic, picked up by Gigonnet after the pillage of Versailles, where the populace broke nearly everything, came from the queen's boudoir; but these rare vases were flanked by two candelabra of abject shape made of wrought-iron, and the barbarous contrast recalled the circumstances under which the vases had been acquired.

"I know that you have not come on your own account," said Gigonnet, "but on behalf of the great Birotteau. Well, what is it, my friends?"

"We can tell you nothing that you do not already know; so I will be brief," said Pillerault. "You have notes to the order of Claparon?"

"Yes."

"Will you exchange the first fifty thousand of those notes against notes of Monsieur Popinot, here present, — less the discount, of course?"

Gigonnet took off the terrible green cap which seemed to have been born on him, pointed to his skull, denuded of hair and of the color of fresh butter, made his usual Voltairean grimace, and said: "You wish to pay me in hair-oil; have I any use for it?"

"If you choose to jest, there is nothing to be done but to beat a retreat," said Pillerault.

"You speak like the wise man that you are," answered Gigonnet, with a flattering smile.

"Well, suppose I indorse Monsieur Popinot's notes?" said Pillerault, playing his last card.

"You are gold by the ingot, Monsieur Pillerault; but I don't want bars of gold, I want my money."

Pillerault and Popinot bowed and went away. Going down the stairs, Popinot's knees shook under him.

"Is that a man?" he said to Pillerault.

"They say so," replied the other. "My boy, always bear in mind this short interview. Anselme, you have just seen the banking-business unmasked, without its cloak of courtesy. Unexpected events are the screw of the press, we are the grapes, the bankers are the casks. That land speculation is no doubt a good one; Gigonnet, or some one behind him, means to strangle César and step into his skin. It is all over; there's no remedy. But such is the Bank: be warned; never have recourse to it!"

After this horrible morning, during which Madame Birotteau for the first time sent away those who came for their money, taking their addresses, the courageous woman, happy in the thought that she was thus sparing her husband from distress, saw Popinot and Pillerault, for whom she waited with ever-growing anxiety, return at eleven o'clock, and read her sentence in their faces. The assignment was inevitable.

"He will die of grief," said the poor woman.

"I could almost wish he might," said Pillerault, solemnly; "but he is so religious that, as things are now, his director, the Abbé Loraux, alone can save him."

Pillerault, Popinot, and Constance waited while a clerk was sent to bring the Abbé Loraux, before they

carried up to César the schedule which Célestin had prepared, and asked him to affix his signature. The clerks were in despair, for they loved their master. At four o'clock the good priest came; Constance explained the misfortune that had fallen upon them, and the abbé went upstairs as a soldier mounts the breach.

"I know why you have come!" cried Birotteau.

"My son," said the priest, "your feelings of resignation to the Divine will have long been known to me; it now remains to apply them. Keep your eyes upon the cross; never cease to behold it, and think upon the humiliations heaped upon the Saviour of men. Meditate upon the agonies of his passion, and you will be able to bear the mortification which God has laid upon you —"

"My brother, the abbé, has already prepared me," said César, showing the letter, which he had re-read and now held out to his confessor.

"You have a good brother," said Monsieur Loraux, "a virtuous and gentle wife, a tender daughter, two good friends, — your uncle and our dear Anselme, — two indulgent creditors, the Ragons: all these kind hearts will pour balm upon your wounds daily, and will help you to bear your cross. Promise me to have the firmness of a martyr, and to face the blow without faltering."

The abbé coughed, to give notice to Pillerault who was waiting in the salon.

"My resignation is unbounded," said César, calmly. "Dishonor has come; I must now think only of reparation."

The firm voice of the poor man and his whole manner surprised Césarine and the priest. Yet nothing

could be more natural. All men can better bear a known and definite misfortune than the cruel uncertainties of a fate which, from one moment to another, brings excessive hope or crushing sorrow.

"I have dreamed a dream for twenty-two years; to-day I awake with my cudgel in my hand," said César, his mind turning back to the Tourangian peasant days.

Pillerault pressed his nephew in his arms as he heard the words. Birotteau saw that his wife, Anselme, and Célestin were present. The papers which the head-clerk held in his hand were significant. César calmly contemplated the little group where every eye was sad but loving.

"Stay!" he said, unfastening his cross, which he held out to the Abbé Loraux; "give it back to me on the day when I can wear it without shame. Célestin," he added, "write my resignation as deputy-mayor,—Monsieur l'abbé will dictate the letter to you; date it the 14th, and send it at once to Monsieur de la Billardière by Raguet."

Célestin and the abbé went down stairs. For a quarter of an hour silence reigned unbroken in César's study. Such strength of mind surprised the family. Célestin and the abbé came back, and César signed his resignation. When his uncle Pillerault presented the schedule and the papers of his assignment, the poor man could not repress a horrible nervous shudder.

"My God, have pity upon me!" he said, signing the dreadful paper, and holding it out to Célestin.

"Monsieur," said Anselme Popinot, over whose dejected brow a luminous light flashed suddenly

"madame, do me the honor to grant me the hand of Mademoiselle Césarine."

At these words tears came into the eyes of all present except César; he rose, took Anselme by the hand and said, in a hollow voice, "My son, you shall never marry the daughter of a bankrupt."

Anselme looked fixedly at Birotteau and said: "Monsieur, will you pledge yourself, here, in presence of your whole family, to consent to our marriage, if mademoiselle will accept me as her husband, on the day when you have retrieved your failure?"

There was an instant's silence, during which all present were affected by the emotions painted on the worn face of the poor man.

"Yes," he said, at last.

Anselme made a gesture of unspeakable joy, as he took the hand which Cesarine held out to him, and kissed it.

"You consent, then?" he said to her.

"Yes," she answered.

"Now that I am one of the family, I have the right to concern myself in its affairs," he said, with a strange, excited expression of face.

He left the room precipitately, that he might not show a joy which contrasted too cruelly with the sorrow of his master. Anselme was not actually happy at the failure, but love is such an egoist! Even Césarine felt within her heart an emotion that contradicted her bitter grief.

"Now that we have got so far," whispered Pillerault to Constance, "shall we strike the last blow?"

Madame Birotteau let a sign of grief rather than of acquiescence escape her.

"My nephew," said Pillerault, addressing César, "what do you intend to do?"

"To carry on my business."

"That would not be my judgment," said Pillerault. "Take my advice, wind up everything, make over your whole assets to your creditors, and keep out of business. I have often imagined how it would be if I were in a situation such as yours — Ah, one has to foresee everything in business! a merchant who does not think of failure is like a general who counts on never being defeated; he is only half a merchant. I, in your position, would never have continued in business. What! be forced to blush before the men I had injured, to bear their suspicious looks and tacit reproaches? I can conceive of the guillotine — a moment, and all is over. But to have the head replaced, and daily cut off anew, — that is agony I could not have borne. Many men take up their business as if nothing had happened: so much the better for them; they are stronger than Claude-Joseph Pillerault. If you pay in cash, and you are obliged to do so, they say that you have kept back part of your assets; if you are without a penny, it is useless to attempt to recover yourself. No, give up your property, sell your business, and find something else to do."

"What could I find?" said César.

"Well," said Pillerault, "look for a situation. You have influential friends, — the Duc and the Duchesse de Lenoncourt, Madame de Mortsauf, Monsieur de Vandenesse. Write to them, go and see them; they might get you a situation in the royal household which would give you a thousand crowns or so; your wife could

earn as much more, and perhaps your daughter also. The situation is not hopeless. You three might earn nearly ten thousand francs a year. In ten years you could pay off a hundred thousand francs, for you shall not use a penny of what you earn; your two women will have fifteen hundred francs a year from me for their expenses, and, as for you, — we will see about that."

Constance and César laid these wise words to heart. Pillerault left them to go to the Bourse, which in those days was held in a provisional wooden building of a circular shape, and was entered from the Rue Feydeau. The failure, already known, of a man lately noted and envied, excited general comment in the upper commercial circles, which at that period were all "constitutionnel." The gentry of the Opposition claimed a monopoly of patriotism. Royalists might love the king, but to love your country was the exclusive privilege of the Left; the people belonged to it. The downfall of a protegé of the palace, of a ministerialist, an incorrigible royalist who on the 13th Vendémiaire had insulted the cause of liberty by fighting against the glorious French Revolution, — such a downfall excited the applause and tittle-tattle of the Bourse. Pillerault wished to learn and study the state of public opinion. He found in one of the most animated groups du Tillet, Gobenheim-Keller, Nucingen, old Guillaume, and his son-in-law Joseph Lebas, Claparon, Gigonnet, Mongenod, Camusot, Gobseck, Adolphe Keller, Palma, Chiffreville, Matifat, Grindot, and Lourdois.

"What caution one needs to have!" said Gobenheim to du Tillet. "It was a mere chance that one of my brothers-in-law did not give Birotteau a credit."

"I am in for ten thousand francs," said du Tillet; "he asked me for them two weeks ago, and I let him have them on his own note without security. But he formerly did me some service, and I am willing to lose the money."

"Your nephew has done like all the rest," said Lourdois to Pillerault, — "given balls and parties! That a scoundrel should try to throw dust in people's eyes, I can understand; but it is amazing that a man who passed for as honest as the day should play those worn-out, knavish tricks which we are always finding out and condemning."

"Don't trust people unless they live in hovels like Claparon," said Gigonnet.

"Hey! mein freint," said the fat Nucingen to du Tillet, "you haf joust missed blaying me a bretty drick in zenting Pirôdôt to me. I don't know," he added, addressing Gobenheim the manufacturer, "vy he tid not ask me for fifdy tousand francs. I should haf gif dem to him."

"Oh, no, Monsieur le baron," said Joseph Lebas, "you knew very well that the Bank had refused his paper; you made them reject it in the committee on discounts. The affair of this unfortunate man, for whom I still feel the highest esteem, presents certain peculiar circumstances."

Pillerault pressed the hand of Joseph Lebas.

"Yes," said Mongenod, "it seems impossible to explain what has happened, unless we believe that concealed behind Gigonnet there are certain bankers who want to strangle the speculation in the lands about the Madeleine."

"What has happened is what happens always to those who go out of their proper business," said Claparon, hastily interrupting Mongenod. "If he had set up his own Cephalic Oil instead of running up the price of all the land in Paris by pouncing upon it, he might have lost his hundred thousand francs with Roguin, but he would n't have failed. He will go on now under the name of Popinot."

"Keep a watch on Popinot," said Gigonnet.

Roguin, in the parlance of such worthy merchants, was now the "unfortunate Roguin." César had become "that wretched Birotteau." The one seemed to them excused by his great passion; the other they considered all the more guilty for his harmless pretensions.

Gigonnet, after leaving the Bourse, went round by the Rue Perrin-Gasselin on his way home, in search of Madame Madou, the vendor of dried fruits.

"Well, old woman," he said, with his coarse good-humor, "how goes the business?"

"So-so," said Madame Madou, respectfully, offering her only armchair to the usurer, with a show of attention she had never bestowed on her "dear defunct."

Mother Madou, who would have floored a recalcitrant or too-familiar wagoner and gone fearlessly to the assault of the Tuileries on the 10th of October, who jeered her best customers and was capable of speaking up to the king in the name of her associate market-women, — Angélique Madou received Gigonnet with abject respect. Without strength in his presence, she shuddered under his rasping glance. The lower classes will long tremble at sight of the executioner, and Gigonnet was the executioner of petty commerce.

In the markets no power on earth is so respected as that of the man who controls the flow of money; all other human institutions are as nothing beside him. Justice herself takes the form of a commissioner, a familiar personage in the eyes of the market; but usury seated behind its green boxes, — usury, entreated with fear tugging at the heart-strings, dries up all jesting, parches the throat, lowers the proudest look, and makes the commonest market women respectful.

"Do you want anything of me?" she said.

"A trifle, a mere nothing. Hold yourself ready to make good those notes of Birotteau; the man has failed, and claims must be put in at once. I will send you the account to-morrow morning."

Madame Madou's eyes contracted like those of a cat for a second, and then shot out flames.

"Ah, the villain! Ah, the scoundrel! He came and told me himself he was a deputy-mayor, — a trumped-up story! Reprobate! is that what he calls business? There is no honor among mayors; the government deceives us. Stop! I 'll go and make him pay me; I will — "

"Hey! at such times everybody looks out for himself, my dear!" said Gigonnet, lifting his leg with the quaint little action of a cat fearing to cross a wet place, — a habit to which he owed his nickname. "There are some very big wigs in the matter who mean to get themselves out of the scrape."

"Yes, and I 'll pull my nuts out of the fire, too! Marie-Jeanne, bring my clogs and my rabbit-skin cloak; and quick, too, or I 'll warm you up with a box on the ear."

"There'll be warm work down there!" thought Gigonnet, rubbing his hands as he walked away. "Du Tillet will be satisfied; it will make a fine scandal all through the quarter. I don't know what that poor devil of a perfumer has done to him; for my part I pity the fellow as I do a dog with a broken leg. He is n't a man, he has got no force."

Madame Madou bore down, like an insurrectionary wave from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, upon the shop-door of the hapless Birotteau, which she opened with excessive violence, for her walk had increased her fury.

"Heap of vermin! I want my money; I will have my money! You shall give me my money, or I carry off your scent-bags, and that satin trumpery, and the fans, and everything you've got here, for my two thousand francs. Who ever heard of mayors robbing the people? If you don't pay me I'll send you to the galleys; I'll go to the police, — justice shall be done! I won't leave this place till I've got my money."

She made a gesture as if to break the glass before the shelves on which the valuables were placed.

"Mother Madou takes a drop too much," whispered Célestin to his neighbor.

The virago overheard him, — for in paroxysms of passion the organs are either paralyzed or trebly acute, — and she forthwith applied to Célestin's ear the most vigorous blow that ever resounded in a Parisian perfumery.

"Learn to respect women, my angel," she said, "and don't smirch the names of the people you rob."

"Madame," said Madame Birotteau, entering from the back-shop, where she happened to be with her hus-

band, — whom Pillerault was persuading to go with him, while César, to obey the law, was humbly expressing his willingness to go to prison, — "madame, for heaven's sake do not raise a mob, and bring a crowd upon us!"

"Hey! let them come," said the woman; "I'll tell them a tale that will make you laugh the wrong side of your mouth. Yes, my nuts and my francs, picked up by the sweat of my brow, helped you to give balls. There you are, dressed like the queen of France in woollen which you sheared off the backs of poor sheep such as me! Good God! it would burn my shoulders, that it would, to wear stolen goods! I've got nothing but rabbit-skin to cover my carcass, but it is mine! Brigands, thieves, my money or — "

She darted at a pretty inlaid box containing toilet articles.

"Put that down, madame!" said César, coming forward, "nothing here is mine; everything belongs to my creditors. I own nothing but my own person; if you wish to seize that and put me in prison, I give you my word of honor" — the tears fell from his eyes — "that I will wait here till you have me arrested."

The tone and gesture were so completely in keeping with his words that Madame Madou's anger subsided.

"My property has been carried off by a notary; I am innocent of the disasters I cause," continued César, "but you shall be paid in course of time if I have to die in the effort, and work like a galley-slave as a porter in the markets."

"Come, you are a good man," said the market-woman. "Excuse my words, madame; but I may as well go and drown myself, for Gigonnet will hound me down.

I can't get any money for ten months to redeem those damned notes of yours which I gave him."

"Come and see me to-morrow morning," said Pillerault, showing himself. "I will get you the money from one of my friends, at five per cent."

"Hey! if it is n't the worthy Père Pillerault! Why, to be sure, he 's your uncle," she said to Constance. "Well, you are all honest people, and I sha' n't lose my money, shall I? To-morrow morning, then, old fellow!" she said to the retired ironmonger.

César was determined to live on amid the wreck of his fortunes at "The Queen of Roses," insisting that he would see his creditors and explain his affairs to them himself. In spite of Madame Birotteau's earnest entreaties, Pillerault seemed to approve of César's decision and took him back to his own room. The wily old man then went to Monsieur Haudry, explained the case, and obtained from him a prescription for a sleeping draught, which he took to be made up, and then returned to spend the evening with the family. Aided by Césarine he induced her father to drink with them. The narcotic soon put César to sleep, and when he woke up, fourteen hours later, he was in Pillerault's bedroom, Rue des Bourdonnais, fairly imprisoned by the old man, who was sleeping himself on a cot-bed in the salon.

When Constance heard the coach containing Pillerault and César roll away from the door, her courage deserted her. Our powers are often stimulated by the necessity of upholding some being feebler than ourselves. The poor woman wept to find herself alone in her home as she would have wept for César dead.

"Mamma," said Césarine, sitting on her mother's knee, and caressing her with the pretty kittenish grace which women only display to perfection among themselves, "you said that if I took up my life bravely, you would have strength to bear adversity. Don't cry, dear mother; I am ready and willing to go into some shop, and I shall never think again of what we once were. I shall be like you in your young days; and you shall never hear a complaint, nor even a regret, from me. I have a hope. Did you not hear what Monsieur Anselme said?"

"The dear boy! he shall not be my son-in-law —"

"Oh, mamma!"

"— he shall be my own son."

"Sorrow has one good," said Césarine, kissing her mother; "it teaches us to know our true friends."

The daughter at last eased the pain of the poor woman by changing places and playing the mother to her. The next morning Constance went to the house of the Duc de Lenoncourt, one of the gentlemen of the king's bedchamber, and left a letter asking for an interview at a later hour of the day. In the interval she went to Monsieur de la Billardière, and explained to him the situation in which Roguin's flight had placed César, begging him to go with her to the duke and speak for her, as she feared she might explain matters ill herself. She wanted a place for Birotteau. Birotteau, she said, would be the most upright of cashiers, — if there could be degrees of integrity among honest men.

"The King has just appointed the Comte de Fontaine master of his household; there is no time to be lost in making the application," said the mayor.

At two o'clock Monsieur de la Billardière and Madame César went up the grand staircase of the Hôtel de Lenoncourt, Rue Saint-Dominique, and were ushered into the presence of the nobleman whom the king preferred to all others, — if it can be said that Louis XVIII. ever had a preference. The gracious welcome of this great lord, who belonged to the small number of true gentlemen whom the preceding century bequeathed to ours, encouraged Madame César. She was dignified, yet simple, in her sorrow. Grief ennobles even the plainest people; for it has a grandeur of its own; to reflect its lustre, a nature must needs be true. Constance was a woman essentially true.

The question was, how to speak to the king at once. In the midst of the conference Monsieur de Vandenesse was announced; and the duke exclaimed, "Here is our support!"

Madame Birotteau was not unknown to this young man, who had been to her shop two or three times in search of those trifles which are sometimes of more importance than greater things. The duke explained Monsieur de la Billardière's wishes. As soon as he learned the misfortune which had overtaken the godson of the Marquise d'Uxelles, Vandenesse went at once, accompanied by Monsieur de la Billardière, to the Comte de Fontaine, begging Madame Birotteau to wait their return. Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine was, like Monsieur de la Billardière, one of those fine provincial gentlemen, the heroes, almost unknown, who made "la Vendée." Birotteau was not a stranger to him, for he had seen him in the old days at "The Queen of Roses." Men who had shed their blood for the

royal cause enjoyed at this time certain privileges, which the king kept secret, so as not to give umbrage to the Liberals.

Monsieur de Fontaine, always a favorite with Louis XVIII., was thought to be wholly in his confidence. Not only did the count positively promise a place, but he returned with the two gentlemen to the Duc de Lenoncourt, and asked him to procure for him an audience that very evening; and also to obtain for Billardière an audience with MONSIEUR, who was greatly attached to the old Vendéen diplomatist.

The same evening, the Comte de Fontaine came from the Tuileries to "The Queen of Roses," and announced to Madame Birotteau that as soon as the proceedings in bankruptcy were over, her husband would be officially appointed to a situation in the Sinking-fund Office, with a salary of two thousand five hundred francs, — all the functions in the household of the king being overcrowded with noble supernumeraries to whom promises had already been made.

This success was but one part of the task before Madame Birotteau. The poor woman now went to the "Maison du Chat-qui-pelote," in the Rue Saint-Denis, to find Joseph Lebas. As she walked along she met Madame Roguin in a brilliant equipage, apparently making purchases. Their eyes met; and the shame which the rich woman could not hide as she looked at the ruined woman, gave Constance fresh courage.

"Never will I roll in a carriage bought with the money of others," she said to herself.

Joseph Lebas received her kindly, and she begged him to obtain a place for Césarine in some respectable

commercial establishment. Lebas made no promises; but eight days later Césarine had board, lodging, and a salary of three thousand francs from one of the largest linen-drapers in Paris, who was about to open a branch establishment in the quartier des Italiens. Césarine was put in charge of the desk, and the superintendence of the new shop was intrusted to her; she filled, in fact, a position above that of forewoman, and supplied the place of both master and mistress.

Madame César went from the "Chat-qui-pelote" to the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, and asked Popinot to let her take charge of his accounts and do his writing, and also manage his household. Popinot felt that his was the only house where César's wife could meet with the respect that was due to her, and find employment without humiliation. The noble lad gave her three thousand francs a year, her board, and his own room; going himself into an attic occupied by one of his clerks. Thus it happened that the beautiful woman, after one month's enjoyment of her sumptuous home, came to live in the wretched chamber looking into a damp, dark court, where Gaudissart, Anselme, and Finot had inaugurated Cephalic Oil.

When Molineux, appointed agent by the Court of Commerce, came to take possession of César Birotteau's assets, Madame Birotteau, aided by Célestin, went over the inventory with him. Then the mother and daughter, plainly dressed, left the house on foot and went to their uncle Pillerault's, without once turning their heads to look at the home where they had passed the greater part of their lives. They walked in silence to the Rue des Bourdonnais, where they were to dine with

César for the first time since their separation. It was a sad dinner. Each had had time for reflection, — time to weigh the duties before them, and sound the depths of their courage. All three were like sailors ready to face foul weather, but not deceived as to their danger. Birotteau gathered courage as he was told of the interest people in high places had taken in finding employment for him, but he wept when he heard what his daughter was to become. Then he held out his hand to his wife, as he saw the courage with which she had returned to labor. Old Pillerault's eyes were wet, for the last time in his life, as he looked at these three beings folded together in one embrace; from the centre of which Birotteau, feeblest of the three and the most stricken, raised his hands, saying: —

"Let us have hope!"

"You shall live with me," said Pillerault, "for the sake of economy; you shall have my chamber, and share my bread. I have long been lonely; you shall replace the poor child I lost. From my house it is but a step to your office in the Rue de l'Oratoire."

"God of mercy!" exclaimed Birotteau; "in the worst of the storm a star guides me."

Resignation is the last stage of man's misfortune. From this moment César's downfall was accomplished; he accepted it, and strength returned to him.

VI.

After admitting his insolvency and filing his schedule, a merchant should find some retired spot in France, or in foreign countries, where he may live without taking part in life, like the child that he is; for the law declares him a minor, and not competent for any legal action as a citizen. This, however, is never done. Before reappearing he obtains a safe-conduct, which neither judge nor creditor ever refuses to give; for if the debtor were found without this *exeat* he would be put in prison, while with it he passes safely, as with a flag of truce, through the enemy's camp, — not by way of curiosity, but for the purpose of defeating the severe intention of the laws relating to bankruptcy. The effect of all laws which touch private interests is to develop, enormously, the knavery of men's minds. The object of a bankrupt, like that of other persons whose interests are thwarted by any law, is to make void the law in his particular case.

The status of civil death in which the bankrupt remains a chrysalis lasts for about three months, — a period required by formalities which precede a conference at which the creditors and their debtor sign a treaty of peace, by which the bankrupt is allowed the ability to make payments, and receives a bankrupt's certificate. This transaction is called the *concordat*, — a word imply-

ing, perhaps, that peace reigns after the storm and stress of interests violently in opposition.

As soon as the insolvent's schedule is filed, the Court of commerce appoints a judge-commissioner, whose duty it is to look after the interests of the still unknown body of creditors, and also to protect the insolvent against the vexatious measures of angry creditors, — a double office, which might be nobly magnified if the judges had time to attend to it. The commissioner, however, delegates an agent to take possession of the property, the securities, and the merchandise, and to verify the schedule; when this is done, the court appoints a day for a meeting of the creditors, notice of which is trumpeted forth in the newspapers. The creditors, real or pretended, are expected to be present and choose the provisional assignees, who are to supersede the agent, step into the insolvent's shoes, become by a fiction of law the insolvent himself, and are authorized to liquidate the business, negotiate all transactions, sell the property, — in short, recast everything in the interest of the creditors, provided the bankrupt makes no opposition. The majority of Parisian failures stop short at this point, and the reason is as follows:

The appointment of one or more permanent assignees is an act which gives opportunity for the bitterest action on the part of creditors who are thirsting for vengeance, who have been tricked, baffled, cozened, trapped, duped, robbed, and cheated. Although, as a general thing, all creditors are cheated, robbed, duped, trapped, cozened, tricked, and baffled, yet there is not in all Paris a commercial passion able to keep itself alive for ninety days. The paper of commerce alone maintains its vitality,

and rises, athirst for payment, in three months. Before ninety days are over, the creditors, worn out by coming and going, by the marches and countermarches which a failure entails, are asleep at the side of their excellent little wives. This may help a stranger to understand why it is that the provisional in France is so often the definitive: out of every thousand provisional assignees, not more than five ever become permanent. The subsidence of passions stirred up by failures is thus accounted for.

But here it becomes necessary to explain to persons who have not the happiness to be in business the whole drama of bankruptcy, so as to make them understand how it constitutes in Paris a monstrous legal farce; and also how the bankruptcy of César Birotteau was a signal exception to the general rule.

This fine commercial drama is in three distinct acts, — the agent's act, the assignee's act, the *concordat*, or certificate-of-bankruptcy act. Like all theatrical performances, it is played with a double intent: it is put upon the stage for the public eye, but it has also its hidden purpose; there is one performance for the pit, and another for the side-scenes. Posted in the side-scenes are the bankrupt and his solicitor, the attorney of the creditors, the assignees, the agent, and the judge-commissioner himself. No one out of Paris knows, and no one in Paris does not know, that a judge of the commercial courts is the most extraordinary magistrate that society ever allowed itself to create. This judge may live in dread of his own justice at any moment. Paris has seen the president of her courts of commerce file his own schedule. Instead of being an experienced retired

merchant, to whom the magistracy might properly be made the reward of a pure life, this judge is a trader, bending under the weight of enormous enterprises, and at the head of some large commercial house. The *sine quâ non* condition in the election of this functionary, whose business it is to pass judgment on the avalanche of commercial suits incessantly rolling through the courts, is that he shall have the greatest difficulty in managing his own affairs. This commercial tribunal, far from being made a useful means of transition whereby a merchant might rise, without ridicule, into the ranks of the nobility, is in point of fact made up of traders who are trading, and who are liable to suffer for their judgments when they next meet with dissatisfied parties, — very much as Birotteau was now punished by du Tillet.

The commissioner is of necessity a personage before whom much is said; who listens, recollecting all the while his own interests, and leaves the cause to the assignees and the attorneys, — except, possibly, in a few strange and unusual cases where dishonesty is accompanied by peculiar circumstances, when the judge usually observes that the debtor, or the creditors, as it may happen, are clever people. This personage, set up in the drama like the royal bust in a public audience-chamber, may be found early in the morning at his wood-yard, if he sells wood; in his shop, if, like Birotteau, he is a perfumer; or, in the evenings, at his dessert after dinner, — always, it should be added, in a terrible hurry; as a general thing he is silent. Let us, however, do justice to the law: the legislation that governs his functions, and which was pushed through in

haste, has tied the hands of this commissioner; and it sometimes happens that he sanctions fraud which he cannot hinder, — as the reader will shortly see.

The agent to whom the judge delegates the first proceedings, instead of serving the creditors, may become if he please a tool of the debtor. Every one hopes to swell his own gains by getting on the right side of the debtor, who is always supposed to keep back a hidden treasure. The agent may make himself useful to both parties; on the one hand by not laying the bankrupt's business in ashes, on the other by snatching a few morseis for men of influence, — in short, he runs with the hare and holds with the hounds. A clever agent has frequently arrested judgment by buying up the debts and releasing the merchant, who then rebounds like an india-rubber ball. The agent chooses the best-stocked crib, whether it leads him to cover the largest creditors and shear the debtor, or to sacrifice the creditors for the future prosperity of the restored merchant. The action of the agent is decisive. This man, together with the bankrupt's solicitor, plays the utility rôle in the drama, where it may be said neither the one nor the other would accept a part if not sure of their fees. Taking the average of a thousand failures, an agent will be found nine hundred and fifty times on the side of the bankrupt. At the period of our history, the solicitors frequently sought the judge with the request that he would appoint an agent whom they proposed to him, — a man, as they said, to whom the affairs of the bankrupt were well-known, who would know how to reconcile the interests of the whole body of creditors with those of a man honorably overtaken by misfortune.

For some years past the best judges have sought the advice of the solicitors in this matter for the purpose of not taking it, endeavoring to appoint some other agent *quasi* virtuous.

During this act of the drama the creditors, real or pretended, come forward to select the provisional assignees, who are often, as we have said, the final ones. In this electoral assembly all creditors have the right to vote, whether the sum owing to them is fifty sous, or fifty thousand francs. This assembly, in which are found pretended creditors introduced by the bankrupt, — the only electors who never fail to come to the meeting, — proposes the whole body of creditors as candidates from among whom the commissioner, a president without power, is supposed to select the assignees. Thus it happens that the judge almost always appoints as assignees those creditors whom it suits the bankrupt to have, — another abuse which makes the catastrophe of bankruptcy one of the most burlesque dramas to which justice ever lent her name. The honorable bankrupt overtaken by misfortune is then master of the situation, and proceeds to legalize the theft he premeditated. As a rule, the petty trades of Paris are guiltless in this respect. When a shopkeeper gets as far as making an assignment, the worthy man has usually sold his wife's shawl, pawned his plate, left no stone unturned, and succumbs at last with empty hands, ruined, and without enough money to pay his attorney, who in consequence cares little for him.

The law requires that the *concordat,* at which is granted the bankrupt's certificate that remits to the merchant a portion of his debt, and restores to him the

right of managing his affairs, shall be attended by a majority of the creditors, and also that they shall represent a certain proportion of the debt. This important action brings out much clever diplomacy, on the part of the bankrupt, his assignees, and his solicitor, among the contending interests which cross and jostle each other. A usual and very common manœuvre is to offer to that section of the creditors who make up in number and amount the majority required by law certain premiums, which the debtor consents to pay over and above the dividend publicly agreed upon. This monstrous fraud is without remedy. The thirty commercial courts which up to the present time have followed one after the other, have each known of it, for all have practised it. Enlightened by experience, they have lately tried to render void such fraudulent agreements; and as the bankrupts have reason to complain of the extortion, the judges had some hope of reforming to that extent the system of bankruptcy. The attempt, however, will end in producing something still more immoral; for the creditors will devise other rascally methods, which the judges will condemn as judges, but by which they will profit as merchants.

Another much-used stratagem, and one to which we owe the term "serious and legitimate creditor," is that of creating creditors, — just as du Tillet created a banker and a banking-house, — and introducing a certain quantity of Claparons under whose skin the bankrupt hides, diminishing by just so much the dividends of the true creditors, and laying up for the honest man a store for the future; always, however, providing a sufficient majority of votes and debts to secure the passage of his

certificate. The "gay and illegitimate creditors" are like false electors admitted into the electoral college. What chance has the "serious and legitimate creditor" against the "gay and illegitimate creditor"? Shall he get rid of him by attacking him? How can he do it? To drive out the intruder the legitimate creditor must sacrifice his time, his own business, and pay an attorney to help him; while the said attorney, making little out of it, prefers to manage the bankruptcy in another capacity, and therefore works for the genuine creditor without vigor.

To dislodge the illegitimate creditor it is necessary to thread the labyrinth of proceedings in bankruptcy, search among past events, ransack accounts, obtain by injunction the books of the false creditors, show the improbability of the fiction of their existence, prove it to the judges, sue for justice, go and come, and stir up sympathy; and, finally, to charge like Don Quixote upon each "gay and illegitimate creditor," who if convicted of "gayety" withdraws from court, saying with a bow to the judges, "Excuse me, you are mistaken, I am very 'serious.'" All this without prejudice to the rights of the bankrupt, who may carry Don Quixote and his remonstrance to the upper courts; during which time Don Quixote's own business is suffering, and he is liable to become a bankrupt himself.

The upshot of all this is, that in point of fact the debtor appoints his assignees, audits his own accounts, and draws up the certificate of bankruptcy himself.

Given these premises, it is easy to imagine the devices of Frontin, the trickeries of Sganarelle, the lies of

Mascarille, and the empty bags of Scapin which such a system develops. There has never been a failure which did not generate enough matter to fill the fourteen volumes of "Clarissa Harlowe," if an author could be found to describe them. A single example will suffice. The illustrious Gobseck, — ruler of Palma, Gigonnet, Werbrust, Keller, Nucingen, and the like, — being concerned in a failure where he attempted to roughly handle the insolvent, who had managed to get the better of him, obtained notes from his debtor for an amount which together with the declared dividend made up the sum total of his loss. These notes were to fall due after the *concordat*. Gobseck then brought about a settlement in the *concordat* by which sixty-five per cent was remitted to the bankrupt. Thus the creditors were swindled in the interest of Gobseck. But the bankrupt had signed the illicit notes with the name of his insolvent firm, and he was therefore able to bring them under the reduction of sixty-five per cent. Gobseck, the great Gobseck, received scarcely fifty per cent on his loss. From that day forth he bowed to his debtor with ironical respect.

As all operations undertaken by an insolvent within ten days before his failure can be impeached, prudent men are careful to enter upon certain affairs with a certain number of creditors whose interest, like that of the bankrupt, is to arrive at the *concordat* as fast as possible. Skilful creditors will approach dull creditors or very busy ones, give an ugly look to the failure, and buy up their claims at half what they are worth at the liquidation; in this way they get back their money partly by the dividend on their own claims, partly from

the half, or third, or fourth, gained on these purchased claims.

A failure is the closure, more or less hermetically tight, of a house where pillage has left a few remaining bags of silver. Lucky the man who can get in at a window, slide down a chimney, creep in through the cellar or through a hole, and seize a bag to swell his share! In the general rout, the *sauve qui peut* of Bérésina is passed from mouth to mouth; all is legal and illegal, false and true, honest and dishonest. A man is admired if he "covers" himself. To "cover" himself means that he seizes securities to the detriment of the other creditors. France has lately rung with the discussion of an immense failure that took place in a town where one of the upper courts holds its sittings, and where the judges, having current accounts with the bankrupts, wore such heavy india-rubber mantles that the mantle of justice was rubbed into holes. It was absolutely necessary, in order to avert legitimate suspicion, to send the case for judgment in another court. There was neither judge nor agent nor supreme court in the region where the failure took place that could be trusted.

This alarming commercial tangle is so well understood in Paris, that unless a merchant is involved to a large amount he accepts a failure as total shipwreck without insurance, passes it to his profit-and-loss account, and does not commit the folly of wasting time upon it; he contents himself with brewing his own malt. As to the petty trader, worried about his monthly payments, busied in pushing the chariot of his little fortunes, a long and costly legal process terrifies

him. He gives up trying to see his way, imitates the substantial merchant, bows his head and accepts his loss.

The wholesale merchants seldom fail, nowadays; they make friendly liquidations; the creditors take what is given to them, and hand in their receipts. In this way many things are avoided, — dishonor, judicial delays, fees to lawyers, and the depreciation of merchandise. All parties think that bankruptcy will give less in the end than liquidation. There are now more liquidations than bankruptcies in Paris.

The assignee's act in the drama is intended to prove that every assignee is incorruptible, and that no collusion has ever existed between any of them and the bankrupt. The pit — which has all, more or less, been assignee in its day — knows very well that every assignee is a "covered" merchant. It listens, and believes as it likes. After three months employed in auditing the debtor and creditor accounts, the time comes for the *concordat*. The provisional assignees make a little report at the meeting, of which the following is the usual formula: —

Messieurs, — There is owing to the whole of us, in bulk, about a million. We have dismantled our man like a condemned frigate. The nails, iron, wood, and copper will bring about three hundred thousand francs. We shall thus get about thirty per cent of our money. Happy in obtaining this amount, when our debtor might have left us only one hundred thousand, we hereby declare him an Aristides; we vote him a premium and crown of encouragement, and propose to leave him to manage his assets, giving him ten or twelve years in which to pay us the fifty per cent which he

has been so good as to offer us. Here is the certificate of bankruptcy; have the goodness to walk up to the desk and sign it.

At this speech, all the fortunate creditors congratulate each other and shake hands. After the ratification of the certificate, the bankrupt becomes once more a merchant, precisely such as he was before; he receives back his securities, he continues his business, he is not deprived of the power to fail again, on the promised dividend, — an additional little failure which often occurs, like the birth of a child nine months after the mother has married her daughter.

If the certificate of bankruptcy is not granted, the creditors then select the permanent assignees, take extreme measures, and form an association to get possession of the whole property and the business of their debtor, seizing everything that he has or ever will have, — his inheritance from his father, his mother, his aunt, *et cætera*. This stern measure can only be carried through by an association of creditors.

There are therefore two sorts of failure, — the failure of the merchant who means to repossess himself of his business, and the failure of the merchant who has fallen into the water and is willing to sink to the bottom. Pillerault knew the difference. It was, to his thinking and to that of Ragon, as hard to come out pure from the first as to come out safe from the second. After advising César to abandon everything to his creditors, he went to the most honorable solicitor in such matters, that immediate steps might be taken to liquidate the failure and put everything at once at the

disposition of the creditors. The law requires that while the drama is being acted, the creditors shall provide for the support of the bankrupt and his family. Pillerault notified the commissioner that he would himself supply the wants of his niece and nephew.

Du Tillet had worked all things together to make the failure a prolonged agony for his old master; and this is how he did it. Time is so precious in Paris that it is customary, when two assignees are appointed, for only one to attend to the affair: the duty of the other is merely formal, — he approves and signs, like the second notary in notarial deeds. By this means, the largest failures in Paris are so vigorously handled that, in spite of the law's delays, they are adjusted, settled, and secured with such rapidity that within a hundred days the judge can echo the atrocious saying of the Minister, — "Order reigns in Warsaw."

Du Tillet meant to compass César's commercial death. The names of the assignees selected through the influence of du Tillet were very significant to Pillerault. Monsieur Bidault, called Gigonnet, — the principal creditor, — was the one to take no active part; and Molineux, the mischievous old man who lost nothing by the failure, was to manage everything. Du Tillet flung the noble commercial carcass to the little jackal, that he might torment it as he devoured it. After the meeting at which the creditors appointed the assignees, little Molineux returned home "honored," so he said, "by the suffrages of his fellow-citizens;" happy in the prospect of hectoring Birotteau, just as a child delights in having an insect to maltreat. The landlord, astride of his hobby,

— the law, — begged du Tillet to favor him with his ideas; and he bought a copy of the commercial Code. Happily, Joseph Lebas, cautioned by Pillerault, had already requested the president of the Board of Commerce to select a sagacious and well-meaning commissioner. Gobenheim-Keller, whom du Tillet hoped to have, found himself displaced by Monsieur Camusot, a substitute-judge, — a rich silk-merchant, Liberal in politics, and the owner of the house in which Pillerault lived; a man counted honorable.

One of the cruellest scenes of César's life was his forced conference with little Molineux, — the being he had once regarded as a nonentity, who now by a fiction of law had become César Birotteau. He was compelled to go to the Cour Batave, to mount the six flights, and re-enter the miserable appartement of the old man, now his custodian, his *quasi* judge, — the representative of his creditors. Pillerault accompanied him.

"What is the matter?" said the old man, as César gave vent to an exclamation.

"Ah, uncle! you do not know the sort of man this Molineux is!"

"I have seen him from time to time for fifteen years past at the café David, where he plays dominoes. That is why I have come with you."

Monsieur Molineux showed the utmost politeness to Pillerault, and much disdainful condescension to the bankrupt; he had thought over his part, studied the shades of his demeanor, and prepared his ideas.

"What information is it that you need?" asked Pillerault. "There is no dispute as to the claims."

"Oh," said little Molineux, "the claims are in order, — they have been examined. The creditors are all serious and legitimate. But the law, monsieur, — the law! The expenditures of the bankrupt have been disproportioned to his fortune. It appears that the ball — "

"At which you were present," interrupted Pillerault.

" — cost nearly sixty thousand francs, and at that time the assets of the insolvent amounted to not more than one hundred and a few thousand francs. There is cause to arraign the bankrupt on a charge of wilful bankruptcy."

"Is that your intention?" said Pillerault, noticing the despondency into which these words had cast Birotteau.

"Monsieur, I make a distinction; the Sieur Birotteau was a member of the municipality — "

"You have not sent for us, I presume, to explain that we are to be brought into a criminal police court?" said Pillerault. "The café David would laugh finely at your conduct this evening."

The opinion of the café David seemed to frighten the old man, who looked at Pillerault with a startled air. He had counted on meeting Birotteau alone, intending to pose as the sovereign arbiter of his fate, — a legal Jupiter. He meant to frighten him with the thunderbolt of an accusation, to brandish the axe of a criminal charge over his head, enjoy his fears and his terrors, and then allow himself to be touched and softened, and persuaded at last to restore his victim to a life of perpetual gratitude. Instead of his insect, he had got hold of an old commercial sphinx.

"Monsieur," he replied, "I see nothing to laugh at."

"Excuse me," said Pillerault. "You have negotiated largely with Monsieur Claparon; you have neglected the interests of the main body of the creditors, so as to make sure that certain claims shall have a preference. Now I can as one of the creditors interfere. The commissioner is to be taken into account."

"Monsieur," said Molineux, "I am incorruptible."

"I am aware of it," said Pillerault. "You have only taken your iron out of the fire, as they say. You are keen; you are acting just as you do with your tenants —"

"Oh, monsieur!" said the assignee, suddenly dropping into the landlord, — just as the cat metamorphosed into a woman ran after a mouse when she caught sight of it, — "my affair of the Rue Montorgueil is not yet settled. What they call an impediment has arisen. The tenant is the chief tenant. This conspirator declares that as he has paid a year in advance, and having only one more year to" — here Pillerault gave César a look which advised him to pay strict attention — "and, the year being paid for, that he has the right to take away his furniture. I shall sue him! I must hold on to my securities to the last; he may owe something for repairs before the year is out."

"But," said Pillerault, "the law only allows you to take furniture as security for the rent —"

"And its accessories!" cried Molineux, assailed in his trenches. "That article in the Code has been interpreted by various judgments rendered in the matter: however, there ought to be legislative rectification of it. At this very moment I am elaborating a memorial to his Highness, the Keeper of the Seals,

relating to this flaw in our statutes. It is desirable that the government should maintain the interests of landlords. That is the chief question in statecraft. We are the tap-root of taxation."

"You are well fitted to enlighten the government," said Pillerault; "but in what way can we enlighten you — about our affairs?"

"I wish to know," said Molineux, with pompous authority, "if Monsieur Birotteau has received moneys from Monsieur Popinot."

"No, monsieur," said Birotteau.

Then followed a discussion on Birotteau's interests in the house of Popinot, from which it appeared that Popinot had the right to have all his advances paid in full, and that he was not involved in the failure to the amount of half the costs of his establishment, due to him by Birotteau. Molineux, judiciously handled by Pillerault, insensibly got back to gentler ways, which only showed how he cared for the opinion of those who frequented the café David. He ended by offering consolation to Birotteau, and by inviting him, as well as Pillerault, to share his humble dinner. If the ex-perfumer had gone alone, he would probably have irritated Molineux, and the matter would have become envenomed. In this instance, as in others, old Pillerault was his tutelary angel.

Commercial law imposes a horrible torture upon the bankrupt; he is compelled to appear in person at the meeting of his creditors, when they decide upon his future fate. For a man who can hold himself above it all, or for a merchant who expects to recover himself, this ceremony is little feared. But to a man like César

Birotteau it was agony only to be compared to the last day of a criminal condemned to death. Pillerault did all in his power to make that terrible day endurable to his nephew.

The steps taken by Molineux, and agreed to by the bankrupt, were as follows: The suit relating to the mortgage on the property in the Faubourg du Temple having been won in the courts, the assignees decided to sell that property, and César made no opposition. Du Tillet, hearing privately that the government intended to cut a canal which should lead from Saint-Denis to the upper Seine through the Faubourg du Temple, bought the property of Birotteau for seventy thousand francs. All César's rights in the lands about the Madeleine were turned over to Monsieur Claparon, on condition that he on his side would abandon all claim against Birotteau for half the costs of drawing up and registering the contracts; also for all payments on the price of the lands, by receiving himself, under the failure, the dividend which was to be paid over to the sellers. The interests of the perfumer in the house of Popinot and Company were sold to the said Popinot for the sum of forty-eight thousand francs. The business of "The Queen of Roses" was bought by Célestin Crevel at fifty-seven thousand francs, with the lease, the fixtures, the merchandise, furniture, and all rights in the Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm, with twelve years' lease of the manufactories, whose various appliances were also sold to him. The assets when liquidated came to one hundred and ninety-five thousand francs, to which the assignees added seventy thousand produced by Birotteau's claims in the liquidation of the "unfortunate"

Roguin. Thus the total amount made over to César's creditors was two hundred and fifty-five thousand francs. The debts amounted to four hundred and forty thousand; consequently, the creditors received more than fifty per cent on their claims.

Bankruptcy is a species of chemical transmutation, from which a clever merchant tries to emerge in fresh shape. Birotteau, distilled to the last drop in this retort, gave a result which made du Tillet furious. Du Tillet looked to see a dishonorable failure; he saw an honorable one. Caring little for his own gains, though he was about to get possession of the lands around the Madeleine without ever drawing his purse-strings, he wanted to see his old master dishonored, lost, and vilified. The creditors at the general meeting would undoubtedly show the poor man that they respected him.

By degrees, as Birotteau's courage came back to him, Pillerault, like a wise doctor, informed him, by gradual doses, of the transactions resulting from his failure. These harsh tidings were like so many blows. A merchant cannot learn without a shock the depreciation of property which represents to him so much money, so much solicitude, so much labor. The facts his uncle now told him petrified the poor man.

"Fifty-seven thousand francs for 'The Queen of Roses'! Why, the shop alone cost ten thousand; the appartement cost forty thousand; the mere outlay on the manufactories, the utensils, the frames, the boilers, cost thirty thousand. Why! at fifty per cent abatement, if my creditors allow me that, there would still be ten thousand francs worth of property in the shop. Why!

the Paste and the Balm are solid property, — worth as much as a farm!"

Poor César's jeremiads made no impression upon Pillerault. The old merchant took them as a horse takes a down-pour; but he was alarmed by the gloomy silence Birotteau maintained when it was a question of the meeting. Those who comprehend the vanities and weaknesses which in all social spheres beset mankind, will know what a martyrdom it was for this poor man to enter as a bankrupt the commercial tribunal of justice where he once sat as judge; to meet affronts where so often he had been thanked for services rendered, — he, Birotteau, whose inflexible opinions about bankruptcy were so well known; he who had said, "A man may be honest till he fails, but he comes out of a meeting of his creditors a swindler." Pillerault watched for the right moment to familiarize César's mind with the thought of appearing before his creditors as the law demands. The thought killed him. His mute grief and resignation made a deep impression on his uncle, who often heard him at night, through the partition, crying out to himself, "Never! never! I will die sooner."

Pillerault, a strong man, — strong through the simplicity of his life, — was able to understand weakness. He resolved to spare César the anguish of appearing before his creditors, — a terrible scene which the law renders inevitable, and to which, indeed, he might succumb. On this point the law is precise, formal, and not to be evaded. The merchant who refused to appear would, for that act alone, be brought before the criminal police courts. But though the law compels the bankrupt to appear, it has no power to oblige the creditor to do so.

A meeting of creditors is a ceremony of no real importance except in special cases, — when, for instance, a swindler is to be dispossessed and a coalition among the creditors agreed upon, when there is difference of opinion between the privileged creditors and the unsecured creditors, or when the *concordat* is specially dishonest, and the bankrupt is in need of a deceptive majority. But in the case of a failure when all has been given up, the meeting is a mere formality. Pillerault went to each creditor, one after the other, and asked him to give his proxy to his attorney. Every creditor, except du Tillet, sincerely pitied César, after striking him down. Each knew that his conduct was scrupulously honest, that his books were regular, and his business as clear as the day. All were pleased to find no "gay and illegitimate creditor" among them. Molineux, first the agent and then the provisional assignee, had found in César's house everything the poor man owned, even the engraving of Hero and Leander which Popinot had given him, his personal trinkets, his breast-pin, his gold buckles, his two watches, — things which an honest man might have taken without thinking himself less than honest. Constance had left her modest jewel-case. This touching obedience to the law struck the commercial mind keenly. Birotteau's enemies called it foolishness; but men of sense held it up in its true light as a magnificent supererogation of integrity. In two months the opinion of the Bourse had changed; every one, even those who were most indifferent, admitted this failure to be a rare commercial wonder, seldom seen in the markets of Paris. Thus the creditors, knowing that they were secure of nearly sixty per cent of their claims,

were very ready to do what Pillerault asked of them. The solicitors of the commercial courts are few in number; it therefore happened that several creditors employed the same man, giving him their proxies. Pillerault finally succeeded in reducing the formidable assemblage to three solicitors, himself, Ragon, the two assignees, and the commissioner.

Early in the morning of the solemn day, Pillerault said to his nephew, —

"César, you can go to your meeting to-day without fear; nobody will be there."

Monsieur Ragon wished to accompany his debtor. When the former master of "The Queen of Roses" first made known the wish in his little dry voice, his ex-successor turned pale; but the good old man opened his arms, and Birotteau threw himself into them as a child into the arms of its father, and the two perfumers mingled their tears. The bankrupt gathered courage as he felt the indulgence shown to him, and he got into the coach with his uncle and Ragon. Precisely at half past ten o'clock the three reached the cloister Saint-Merri, where the Court of Commerce was then held. At that hour there was no one in the Hall of Bankruptcy. The day and the hour had been chosen by agreement with the judge and the assignees. The three solicitors were already there on behalf of their clients. There was nothing, therefore, to distress or intimidate César Birotteau; yet the poor man could not enter the office of Monsieur Camusot — which chanced to be the one he had formerly occupied — without deep emotion, and he shuddered as he passed through the Hall of Bankruptcy.

"It is cold," said Monsieur Camusot to Birotteau. "I am sure these gentlemen will not be sorry to stay here, instead of our going to freeze in the Hall." He did not say the word "Bankruptcy." "Gentlemen, be seated."

Each took his seat, and the judge gave his own arm-chair to Birotteau, who was bewildered. The solicitors and the assignees signed the papers.

"In consideration of the surrender of your entire property, said Camusot to Birotteau, "your creditors unanimously agree to relinquish the rest of their claims. Your certificate is couched in terms which may well soften your pain; your solicitor will see that it is promptly recorded; you are now free. All the judges of this court, dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Camusot, taking him by the hand, "feel for your position, and are not surprised at your courage; none have failed to do justice to your integrity. In the midst of a great misfortune you have been worthy of what you once were here. I have been in business for twenty years, and this is only the second time that I have seen a fallen merchant gaining, instead of losing, public respect."

Birotteau took the hands of the judge and wrung them, with tears in his eyes. Camusot asked him what he now meant to do. Birotteau replied that he should work till he had paid his creditors in full to the last penny.

"If to accomplish that noble task you should ever want a few thousand francs, you will always find them with me," said Camusot. "I would give them with a great deal of pleasure to witness a deed so rare in Paris."

Pillerault, Ragon, and Birotteau retired.

"Well! that was n't the ocean to drink," said Pillerault, as they left the court-room.

"I recognize your hand in it," said the poor man, much affected.

"Now, here you are, free, and we are only a few steps from the Rue des Cinq-Diamants; come and see my nephew," said Ragon.

A cruel pang shot through César's heart when he saw Constance sitting in a little office in the damp, dark *entresol* above the shop, whose single window was one third darkened by a sign which intercepted the daylight and bore the name, — A. POPINOT.

"Behold a lieutenant of Alexander," said César, with the gayety of grief, pointing to the sign.

This forced gayety, through which an inextinguishable sense of the superiority which Birotteau attributed to himself was naïvely revealed, made Ragon shudder in spite of his seventy years. César saw his wife passing down letters and papers for Popinot to sign; he could neither restrain his tears nor keep his face from turning pale.

"Good-morning, my friend," she said to him, smiling.

"I do not ask if you are comfortable here," said César, looking at Popinot.

"As if I were living with my own son," she answered, with a tender manner that struck her husband.

Birotteau took Popinot and kissed him, saying, —

"I have lost the right, forever, of calling him my son."

"Let us hope!" said Popinot. "*Your* oil succeeds — thanks to my advertisements in the newspapers, and to

Gaudissart, who has travelled over the whole of France ; he has inundated the country with placards and prospectuses ; he is now at Strasburg getting the prospectuses printed in the German language, and he is about to descend, like an invasion, upon Germany itself. We have received orders for three thousand gross."

" Three thousand gross ! " exclaimed César.

" And I have bought a piece of land in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, — not dear, — where I am building a manufactory."

" Wife," whispered César to Constance, " with a little help we might have pulled through."

After that fatal day César, his wife, and daughter understood each other. The poor clerk resolved to attain an end which, if not impossible, was at least gigantic in its enterprise, — namely, the payment of his debts to their last penny. These three beings, — father, mother, daughter, — bound together by the tie of a passionate integrity, became misers, denying themselves everything ; a farthing was sacred in their eyes. Out of sheer calculation Césarine threw herself into her business with the devotion of a young girl. She sat up at night, taxing her ingenuity to find ways of increasing the prosperity of the establishment, and displaying an innate commercial talent. The masters of the house were obliged to check her ardor for work ; they rewarded her by presents, but she refused all articles of dress and the jewels which they offered her. Money ! money ! was her cry. Every month she carried her salary and her little earnings to her uncle Pillerault. César did the same ; so did Madame Birotteau. All three, feel-

ing themselves incapable, dared not take upon themselves the responsibility of managing their money, and they made over to Pillerault the whole business of investing their savings. Returning thus to business, the latter made the most of these funds by negotiations at the Bourse. It was known afterwards that he had been helped in this work by Jules Desmarets and Joseph Lebas, both of whom were eager to point out opportunities which Pillerault might take without risk.

César, though he lived with his uncle, never ventured to question him as to what was done with the money acquired by his labor and that of his wife and daughter. He walked the streets with a bowed head, hiding from every eye his stricken, dull, distraught face. He felt, with self-reproach, that the cloth he wore was too good for him.

"At least," he said to Pillerault, with a look that was angelic, "I do not eat the bread of my creditors. Your bread is sweet to me, though it is your pity that gives it; thanks to your sacred charity, I do not steal a farthing of my salary!"

The merchants, his old associates, who met the clerk could see no vestige of the perfumer. Even careless minds gained an idea of the immensity of human disaster from the aspect of this man, on whose face sorrow had cast its black pall, who revealed the havoc caused by that which had never before appeared in him, — by thought! *N'est pas détruit qui veut.* Light-minded people, devoid of conscience, to whom all things are indifferent, can never present such a spectacle of disaster. Religion alone sets a special seal upon fallen human beings; they believe in a future, in a divine

Providence; within them gleams a light that marks them, a look of saintly resignation mingled with hope, which lends them a certain tender emotion; they realize all that they have lost, like the exiled angel weeping at the gates of heaven. Bankrupts are forbidden to enter the Bourse. César, driven from the regions of integrity, was like an angel sighing for pardon. For fourteen months he lived on, full of religious thoughts with which his fall inspired him, and denying himself every pleasure. Though sure of the Ragons' friendship, nothing could induce him to dine with them, nor with the Lebas, nor the Matifats, nor the Protez and Chiffrevilles, not even with Monsieur Vauquelin; all of whom were eager to do honor to his rare virtue. César preferred to be alone in his room rather than meet the eye of a creditor. The warmest greetings of his friends reminded him the more bitterly of his position. Constance and Césarine went nowhere. On Sundays and fête days, the only days when they were at liberty, the two women went to fetch César at the hour for Mass, and they stayed with him at Pillerault's after their religious duties were accomplished. Pillerault often invited the Abbé Loraux, whose words sustained César in this life of trial. And in this way their lives were spent. The old ironmonger had too tough a fibre of integrity not to approve of César's sensitive honor. His mind, however, turned on increasing the number of persons among whom the poor bankrupt might show himself with an open brow, and an eye that could meet the eyes of his fellows.

VII.

In the month of May, 1820, this family, ever grappling with adversity, received a first reward for its efforts at a little fête which Pillerault, the arbiter of its destinies, prepared for it. The last Sunday of that month was the anniversary of the day on which Constance had consented to marry César. Pillerault, in concert with the Ragons, hired a little country-house at Sceaux, and the worthy old ironmonger silently prepared a joyous house-warming.

"César," said Pillerault, on the Saturday evening, "to-morrow we are all going into the country, and you must come."

César, who wrote a superb hand, spent his evenings in copying for Derville and other lawyers. On Sundays, justified by ecclesiastical permission, he worked like a negro.

"No," he said, "Monsieur Derville is waiting for a guardianship account."

"Your wife and daughter ought to have some reward. You will meet none but our particular friends, — the Abbé Loraux, the Ragons, Popinot, and his uncle. Besides, I wish it."

César and his wife, carried along by the whirlwind of business, had never revisited Sceaux, though from time to time each longed to see once more the tree under which the head-clerk of "The Queen of Roses" had

fainted with joy. During the trip, which César made in a hackney-coach with his wife and daughter, and Popinot who escorted them, Constance cast many meaning glances at her husband without bringing to his lips a single smile. She whispered a few words in his ear; for all answer he shook his head. The soft signs of her tenderness, ever-present yet at the moment forced, instead of brightening César's face made it more sombre, and brought the long-repressed tears into his eyes. Poor man! he had gone over this road twenty years before, young, prosperous, full of hope, the lover of a girl as beautiful as their own Césarine; he was dreaming then of happiness. To-day, in the coach before him, sat his noble child pale and worn by vigils, and his brave wife, whose only beauty now was that of cities through whose streets have flowed the lava waves of a volcano. Love alone remained to him! César's sadness smothered the joy that welled up in the hearts of Césarine and Anselme, who embodied to his eyes the charming scene of other days.

"Be happy, my children! you have earned the right," said the poor father in heart-rending tones. "You may love without one bitter thought."

As he said these words he took his wife's hands and kissed them with a sacred and admiring affection which touched Constance more than the brightest gayety. When they reached the house where Pillerault, the Ragons, the Abbé Loraux, and Popinot the judge were waiting for them, these five choice people assumed an air and manner and speech which put César at his ease; for all were deeply moved to see him still on the morrow of his great disaster.

"Go and take a walk in the Aulnay woods," said Pillerault, putting César's hand into that of Constance; "go with Anselme and Césarine! but come back by four o'clock."

"Poor souls, we should be a restraint upon them," said Madame Ragon, touched by the deep grief of her debtor. "He will be very happy presently."

"It is repentance without sin," said the Abbé Loraux.

"He could rise to greatness only through adversity," said the judge.

To forget is the great secret of strong, creative natures, — to forget, in the way of Nature herself, who knows no past, who begins afresh, at every hour, the mysteries of her untiring travail.

Feeble existences, like that of Birotteau, live sunk in sorrows, instead of transmuting them into doctrines of experience: they let them saturate their being, and are worn-out, finally, by falling more and more under the weight of past misfortunes.

When the two couples reached the path which leads to the woods of Aulnay, placed like a crown upon the prettiest hillside in the neighborhood of Paris, and from which the Vallée-aux-Loups is seen in all its coquetry, the beauty of the day, the charm of the landscape, the first spring verdure, the delicious memory of the happiest day of all his youth, loosened the tight chords in César's soul; he pressed the arm of his wife against his beating heart; his eye was no longer glassy, for the light of pleasure once more brightened in it.

"At last," said Constance to her husband, "I see you again, my poor César. I think we have all behaved

well enough to allow ourselves a little pleasure now and then."

"Ought I?" said the poor man. "Ah! Constance, thy affection is all that remains to me. Yes, I have lost even my old self-confidence; I have no strength left; my only desire is that I may live to die discharged of debt on earth. Thou, dear wife, thou who art my wisdom and my prudence, thou whose eyes saw clear, thou who art irreproachable, thou canst have pleasure. I alone — of us three — am guilty. Eighteen months ago, in the midst of that fatal ball, I saw my Constance, the only woman I have ever loved, more beautiful than the young girl I followed along this path twenty years ago — like our children yonder! In eighteen months I have blasted that beauty, — my pride, my legitimate and sanctioned pride. I love thee better since I know thee well. Oh, *dear!*" he said, giving to the word a tone which reached to the inmost heart of his wife, "I would rather have thee scold me, than see thee so tender to my pain."

"I did not think," she said, "that after twenty years of married life the love of a wife for her husband could deepen."

These words drove from César's mind, for one brief moment, all his sorrows; his heart was so true that they were to him a fortune. He walked forward almost joyously to *their* tree, which by chance had not been felled. Husband and wife sat down beneath it, watching Anselme and Césarine, who were sauntering across the grassy slope without perceiving them, thinking probably that they were still following.

"Mademoiselle," Anselme was saying, "do not think

me so base and grasping as to profit by your father's share which I have acquired in the Cephalic Oil. I am keeping his share for him; I nurse it with careful love. I invest the profits; if there is any loss I put it to my own account. We can only belong to one another on the day when your father is restored to his position, free of debt. I work for that day with all the strength that love has given me."

"Will it come soon?" she said.

"Soon," said Popinot. The word was uttered in a tone so full of meaning, that the chaste and pure young girl inclined her head to her dear Anselme, who laid an eager and respectful kiss upon her brow, — so noble was her gesture and action.

"Papa, all is well," she said to César with a little air of confidence. "Be good and sweet; talk to us, put away that sad look."

When this family, so tenderly bound together, reentered the house, even César, little observing as he was, saw a change in the manner of the Ragons which seemed to denote some remarkable event. The greeting of Madame Ragon was particularly impressive; her look and accent seemed to say to César, "We are paid."

At the dessert, the notary of Sceaux appeared. Pillerault made him sit down, and then looked at César, who began to suspect a surprise, though he was far indeed from imagining the extent of it.

"My nephew, the savings of your wife, your daughter, and yourself, for the last eighteen months, amounted to twenty thousand francs. I have received thirty thousand as the dividend on my claim. We have therefore

fifty thousand francs to divide among your creditors. Monsieur Ragon has received thirty thousand francs for his dividend, and you have now paid him the balance of his claim in full, interest included, for which monsieur here, the notary of Sceaux, has brought you a receipt. The rest of the money is with Crottat, ready for Lourdois, Madame Madou, the mason, carpenter, and the other most pressing creditors. Next year, we may do as well. With time and patience we can go far."

Birotteau's joy is not to be described; he threw himself into his uncle's arms, weeping.

"May he not wear his cross?" said Ragon to the Abbé Loraux.

The confessor fastened the red ribbon to César's buttonhole. The poor clerk looked at himself again and again during the evening in the mirrors of the salon, manifesting a joy at which people thinking themselves superior might have laughed, but which these good bourgeois thought quite natural.

The next day Birotteau went to find Madame Madou.

"Ah, there you are, good soul!" she cried. "I did n't recognize you, you have turned so gray. Yet you don't really drudge, you people; you 've got good places. As for me, I work like a turnspit that deserves baptism."

"But, madame —"

"Never mind, I don't mean it as a reproach," she said. "You have got my receipt."

"I came to tell you that I shall pay you to-morrow, at Monsieur Crottat's, the rest of your claim in full, with interest."

"Is that true?"

"Be there at eleven o'clock."

"Hey! there's honor for you! good measure and running over!" she cried with naïve admiration. "Look here, my good monsieur, I am doing a fine trade with your little red-head. He's a nice young fellow; he lets me earn a fair penny without haggling over it, so that I may get an equivalent for that loss. Well, I'll give you a receipt in full, anyhow; you keep the money, my poor old man! La Madou may get in a fury, and she does scold; but she has got something here —" she cried, thumping the most voluminous mounds of flesh ever yet seen in the markets.

"No," said Birotteau, "the law is plain. I wish to pay you in full."

"Then I won't deny you the pleasure," she said; "and to-morrow I'll trumpet your conduct through the markets. Ha! it's rare, rare!"

The worthy man had much the same scene, with variations, at Lourdois the house painter's, father-in-law of Crottat. It was raining; César left his umbrella at the corner of the door. The prosperous painter, seeing the water trickling into the room where he was breakfasting with his wife, was not tender.

"Come, what do you want, my poor Père Birotteau?" he said, in the hard tone which some people take to importunate beggars.

"Monsieur, has not your son-in-law told you —"

"What?" cried Lourdois, expecting some appeal.

"To be at his office this morning at half past eleven, and give me a receipt for the payment of your claims in full, with interest?"

"Ah, that's another thing! Sit down, Monsieur Birotteau, and eat a mouthful with us."

"Do us the pleasure to share our breakfast," said Madame Lourdois.

"You are doing well, then?" asked the fat Lourdois.

"No, monsieur, I have lived from hand to mouth, that I might scrape up this money; but I hope, in time, to repair the wrongs I have done to my neighbor."

"Ah!" said the painter, swallowing a mouthful of *pâté de foie gras*, "you are truly a man of honor."

"What is Madame Birotteau doing?" asked Madame Lourdois.

"She is keeping the books of Monsieur Anselme Popinot."

"Poor people!" said Madame Lourdois, in a low voice to her husband.

"If you ever need me, my dear Monsieur Birotteau, come and see me," said Lourdois. "I might help —"

"I do need you — at eleven o'clock to-day, monsieur," said Birotteau, retiring.

This first result gave courage to the poor bankrupt, but not peace of mind. On the contrary, the thought of regaining his honor agitated his life inordinately; he completely lost the natural color of his cheeks, his eyes grew sunken and dim, and his face hollow. When old acquaintances met him, in the morning at eight o'clock or in the evening at four, as he went to and from the Rue de l'Oratoire, wearing the surtout coat he wore at the time of his fall, and which he husbanded as a poor sub-lieutenant husbands his uniform, — his hair entirely white, his face pale, his manner timid, — some few

would stop him in spite of himself; for his eye was alert to avoid those he knew as he crept along beside the walls, like a thief.

"Your conduct is known, my friend," said one; "everybody regrets the sternness with which you treat yourself, also your wife and daughter."

"Take a little more time," said others; "the wounds of money do not kill."

"No, but the wounds of the soul do," the poor worn César answered one day to his friend Matifat.

At the beginning of the year 1822, the Canal Saint-Martin was begun. Land in the Faubourg du Temple increased enormously in value. The canal would cut through the property which du Tillet had bought of César Birotteau. The company who obtained the right of building it agreed to pay the banker an exorbitant sum, provided they could take possession within a given time. The lease César had granted to Popinot, which went with the sale to du Tillet, now hindered the transfer to the canal company. The banker came to the Rue des Cinq-Diamants to see the druggist. If du Tillet were indifferent to Popinot, it is very certain that the lover of Césarine felt an instinctive hatred for du Tillet. He knew nothing of the theft and the infamous scheme of the prosperous banker, but an inward voice cried to him, "The man is an unpunished rascal." Popinot would never have transacted the smallest business with him; du Tillet's very presence was odious to his feelings. Under the present circumstances it was doubly so, for the banker was now enriched through the forced spoliation of his former master; the lands about the

Madeleine, as well as those in the Faubourg du Temple, were beginning to rise in price, and to foreshadow the enormous value they were to reach in 1827. So that after du Tillet had explained the object of his visit, Popinot looked at him with concentrated wrath.

"I shall not refuse to give up my lease; but I demand sixty thousand francs for it, and I shall not take one farthing less."

"Sixty thousand francs!" exclaimed du Tillet, making a movement to leave the shop.

"I have fifteen years' lease still to run; it will, moreover, cost me three thousand francs a year to get other buildings. Therefore, sixty thousand francs, or say no more about it," said Popinot, going to the back of the shop, where du Tillet followed him.

The discussion grew warm, Birotteau's name was mentioned; Madame César heard it and came down, and saw du Tillet for the first time since the famous ball. The banker was unable to restrain a gesture of surprise at the change which had come over the beautiful woman; he lowered his eyes, shocked at the result of his own work.

"Monsieur," said Popinot to Madame César, "is going to make three hundred thousand francs out of *your* land, and he refuses *us* sixty thousand francs' indemnity for *our* lease."

"That is three thousand francs a year," said du Tillet.

"Three — thousand — francs!" said Madame César, slowly, in a clear, penetrating voice.

Du Tillet turned pale. Popinot looked at Madame Birotteau. There was a moment of profound silence, which made the scene still more inexplicable to Anselme.

"Sign your relinquishment of the lease, which I have made Crottat draw up," said du Tillet, drawing a stamped paper from a side-pocket. "I will give you a cheque on the Bank of France for sixty thousand francs."

Popinot looked at Madame César without concealing his astonishment; he thought he was dreaming. While du Tillet was writing his cheque at a high desk, Madame César disappeared and went upstairs. The druggist and the banker exchanged papers. Du Tillet bowed coldly to Popinot, and went away.

"At last, in a few months," thought Popinot, as he watched du Tillet going towards the Rue des Lombards, where his cabriolet was waiting, "thanks to this extraordinary affair, I shall have my Césarine. My poor little wife shall not wear herself out any longer. A look from Madame César was enough! What secret is there between her and that brigand? The whole thing is extraordinary."

Popinot sent the cheque at once to the Bank, and went up to speak to Madame Birotteau; she was not in the counting-room, and had doubtless gone to her chamber. Anselme and Constance lived like mother-in-law and son-in-law when people in that relation suit each other; he therefore rushed up to Madame César's appartement with the natural eagerness of a lover on the threshold of his happiness. The young man was prodigiously surprised to find her, as he sprang like a cat into the room, reading a letter from du Tillet, whose handwriting he recognized at a glance. A lighted candle, and the black and quivering phantoms of burned letters lying on the floor made him shudder, for his quick eyes

caught the following words in the letter which Constance held in her hand: —

"I adore you! You know it well, angel of my life, and — "

"What power have you over du Tillet that could force him to agree to such terms?" he said with a convulsive laugh that came from repressed suspicion.

"Do not let us speak of that," she said, showing great distress.

"No," said Popinot, bewildered; "let us rather talk of the end of all your troubles." Anselme turned on his heel towards the window, and drummed with his fingers on the panes as he gazed into the court. "Well," he said to himself, "even if she did love du Tillet, is that any reason why I should not behave like an honorable man?"

"What is the matter, my child?" said the poor woman.

"The total of the net profits of Cephalic Oil mount up to two hundred and forty-two thousand francs; half of that is one hundred and twenty-one thousand," said Popinot, brusquely. "If I withdraw from that amount the forty-eight thousand francs which I paid to Monsieur Birotteau, there remains seventy-three thousand, which, joined to these sixty thousand paid for the relinquishment of the lease, gives *you* one hundred and thirty-three thousand francs."

Madame César listened with fluctuations of joy which made her tremble so violently that Popinot could hear the beating of her heart.

"Well, I have always considered Monsieur Birotteau as my partner," he went on; "we can use this sum to

pay his creditors in full. Add the twenty-eight thousand you have saved and placed in our uncle Pillerault's hands, and we have one hundred and sixty-one thousand francs. Our uncle will not refuse his receipt for his own claim of twenty-five thousand. No human power can deprive me of the right of lending to my father-in-law, by anticipating our profits of next year, the necessary sum to make up the total amount due to his creditor, and — he — will — be — reinstated — restored — "

"Restored!" cried Madame César, falling on her knees beside a chair. She joined her hands and said a prayer; as she did so, the letter slid from her fingers. "Dear Anselme," she said, crossing herself, "dear son!" She took his head in her hands, kissed him on the forehead, pressed him to her heart, and seemed for a moment beside herself. "Césarine is thine! My daughter will be happy at last. She can leave that shop where she is killing herself — "

"For love?" said Popinot.

"Yes," answered the mother, smiling.

"Listen to a little secret," said Popinot, glancing at the fatal letter from a corner of his eye. "I helped Célestin to buy your business; but I did it on one condition, — your appartement was to be kept exactly as you left it. I had an idea in my head, though I never thought that chance would favor it so much. Célestin is bound to sub-let to you your old appartement, where he has never set foot, and where all the furniture will be yours. I have kept the second story, where I shall live with Césarine, who shall never leave you. After our marriage I shall come and pass the days from eight

in the morning till six in the evening here. I will buy out Monsieur César's share in this business for a hundred thousand francs, and that will give you an income to live on. Shall you not be happy?"

"Tell me no more, Anselme, or I shall go out of my mind."

The angelic attitude of Madame César, the purity of her eyes, the innocence of her candid brow, contradicted so gloriously the thoughts which surged in the lover's brain that he resolved to make an end of their monstrosities forever. Sin was incompatible with the life and sentiments of such a woman.

"My dear, adored mother," said Anselme, "in spite of myself, a horrible suspicion has entered my soul. If you wish to see me happy, you will put an end to it at once."

Popinot stretched out his hand and picked up the letter.

"Without intending it," he resumed, alarmed at the terror painted on Constance's face, "I read the first words of this letter of du Tillet. The words coincide in a singular manner with the power you have just shown in forcing that man to accept my absurd exactions; any man would explain it as the devil explains it to me, in spite of myself. Your look — three words suffice —"

"Stop!" said Madame César, taking the letter and burning it. "My son, I am severely punished for a trifling error. You shall know all, Anselme. I shall not allow a suspicion inspired by her mother to injure my daughter; and besides, I can speak without blushing. What I now tell you, I could tell my husband. Du Tillet wished to seduce me; I informed my husband

of it, and du Tillet was to have been dismissed. On the very day my husband was about to send him away, he robbed us of three thousand francs."

"I was sure of it!" said Popinot, expressing his hatred by the tones of his voice.

"Anselme, your future, your happiness, demand this confidence; but you must let it die in your heart, just as it is dead in mine and in César's. Do you not remember how my husband scolded us for an error in the accounts? Monsieur Birotteau, to avoid a police-court which might have destroyed the man for life, no doubt placed in the desk three thousand francs, — the price of that cashmere shawl which I did not receive till three years later. All this explains the scene. Alas! my dear child, I must admit my foolishness; du Tillet wrote me three love-letters, which pictured him so well that I kept them," she said, lowering her eyes and sighing, "as a curiosity. I have not re-read them more than once; still, it was imprudent to keep them. When I saw du Tillet just now I was reminded of them, and I came upstairs to burn them; I was looking over the last as you came in. That's the whole story, my friend."

Anselme knelt for an instant beside her and kissed her hand with an unspeakable emotion, which brought tears into the eyes of both; Madame César raised him, stretched out her arms and pressed him to her heart.

This day was destined to be a day of joy to César. The private secretary of the king, Monsieur de Vandenesse, called at the Sinking-Fund Office to find

him. They walked out together into the little court-yard.

"Monsieur Birotteau," said the Vicomte de Vandenesse, "your efforts to pay your creditors in full have accidentally become known to the king. His Majesty, touched by such rare conduct, and hearing that through humility you no longer wear the cross of the Legion of honor, has sent me to command you to put it on again. Moreover, wishing to help you in meeting your obligations, he has charged me to give you this sum from his privy purse, regretting that he is unable to make it larger. Let this be a profound secret. His Majesty thinks it derogatory to the royal dignity to have his good deeds divulged," said the private secretary, putting six thousand francs into the hand of the poor clerk, who listened to this speech with unutterable emotion. The words that came to his lips were disconnected and stammering. Vandenesse waved his hand to him, smiling, and went away.

The principle which actuated poor César is so rare in Paris that his conduct by degrees attracted admiration. Joseph Lebas, Popinot the judge, Camusot, the Abbé Loraux, Ragon, the head of the important house where Césarine was employed, Lourdois, Monsieur de la Billardière, and others, talked of it. Public opinion, undergoing a change, now lauded him to the skies.

"He is indeed a man of honor!" The phrase even sounded in César's ears as he passed along the streets, and caused him the emotion an author feels when he hears the muttered words: "That is he!" This noble recovery of credit enraged du Tillet. César's first thought on receiving the bank-notes sent by the king

was to use them in paying the debt still due to his former clerk. The worthy man went to the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin just as the banker was returning from the Bourse; they met upon the stairway.

"Well, my poor Birotteau!" said du Tillet, with a stealthy glance.

"Poor!" exclaimed the debtor proudly, "I am very rich. I shall lay my head this night upon my pillow with the happiness of knowing that I have paid you in full."

This speech, ringing with integrity, sent a sharp pang through du Tillet. In spite of the esteem he publicly enjoyed, he did not esteem himself; an inextinguishable voice cried aloud within his soul, "The man is sublime!"

"Pay me?" he said; "why, what business are you doing?"

Feeling sure that du Tillet would not repeat what he told him, Birotteau answered: "I shall never go back to business, monsieur. No human power could have foreseen what has happened to me. Who knows that I might not be the victim of another Roguin? But my conduct has been placed under the eyes of the king; his heart has deigned to sympathize with my efforts; he has encouraged them by sending me a sum of money large enough to —"

"Do you want a receipt?" said du Tillet, interrupting him: "are you going to pay —"

"In full, with interest. I must ask you to come with me now to Monsieur Crottat, only two steps from here."

"Before a notary?"

"Monsieur, I am not forbidden to aim at my complete reinstatement; to obtain it, all deeds and receipts must be legal and undeniable."

"Come, then," said du Tillet, going out with Birotteau; "it is only a step. But where did you take all that money from?"

"I have not taken it," said César; "I have earned it by the sweat of my brow."

"You owe an enormous sum to Claparon."

"Alas! yes; that is my largest debt. I think sometimes I shall die before I pay it."

"You never can pay it," said du Tillet harshly.

"He is right," thought Birotteau.

As he went home the poor man passed, inadvertently, along the Rue Saint-Honoré; for he was in the habit of making a circuit to avoid seeing his shop and the windows of his former home. For the first time since his fall he saw the house where eighteen years of happiness had been effaced by the anguish of three months.

"I hoped to end my days there," he thought; and he hastened his steps, for he caught sight of the new sign, —

CÉLESTIN CREVEL,

SUCCESSOR TO CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

"Am I dazzled, am I going blind? Was that Césarine?" he cried, recollecting a blond head he had seen at the window.

He had actually seen his daughter, his wife, and Popinot. The lovers knew that Birotteau never passed before the windows of his old home, and they had come to the house to make arrangements for a fête which they

intended to give to him. This amazing apparition so astonished Birotteau that he stood stock-still, unable to move.

"There is Monsieur Birotteau looking at his old house," said Monsieur Molineux to the owner of a shop opposite to "The Queen of Roses."

"Poor man!" said the perfumer's former neighbor; "he gave a fine ball — two hundred carriages in the street."

"I was there; and he failed in three months," said Molineux. "I was the assignee."

Birotteau fled, trembling in every limb, and hastened back to Pillerault.

Pillerault, who had just been informed of what had happened in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, feared that his nephew was scarcely fit to bear the shock of joy which the sudden knowledge of his restoration would cause him; for Pillerault was a daily witness of the moral struggles of the poor man, whose mind stood always face to face with his inflexible doctrines against bankruptcy, and whose vital forces were used and spent at every hour. Honor was to César a corpse, for which an Easter morning might yet dawn. This hope kept his sorrow incessantly active. Pillerault took upon himself the duty of preparing his nephew to receive the good news; and when Birotteau came in he was thinking over the best means of accomplishing his purpose. César's joy as he related the proof of interest which the king had bestowed upon him seemed of good augury, and the astonishment he expressed at seeing Césarine at "The Queen of Roses" afforded, Pillerault thought, an excellent opening.

"Well, César," said the old man, "do you know what is at the bottom of it? — the hurry Popinot is in to marry Césarine. He cannot wait any longer; and you ought not, for the sake of your exaggerated ideas of honor, to make him pass his youth eating dry bread with the fumes of a good dinner under his nose. Popinot wishes to lend you the amount necessary to pay your creditors in full."

"Then he would buy his wife," said Birotteau.

"Is it not honorable to reinstate his father-in-law?"

"There would be ground for contention; besides —"

"Besides," exclaimed Pillerault, pretending anger, "you may have the right to immolate yourself if you choose, but you have no right to immolate your daughter."

A vehement discussion ensued, which Pillerault designedly excited.

"Hey! if Popinot lent you nothing," cried Pillerault, "if he had called you his partner, if he had considered the price which he paid to the creditors for your share in the Oil as an advance upon the profits, so as not to strip you of everything —"

"I should have seemed to rob my creditors in collusion with him."

Pillerault feigned to be defeated by this argument. He knew the human heart well enough to be certain that during the night César would go over the question in his own mind, and the mental discussion would accustom him to the idea of his complete vindication.

"But how came my wife and daughter to be in our old appartement?" asked Birotteau, while they were dining.

"Anselme wants to hire it, and live there with Césarine. Your wife is on his side. They have had the banns published without saying anything about it, so as to force you to consent. Popinot says there will be much less merit in marrying Césarine after you are reinstated. You take six thousand francs from the king, and you won't accept anything from your relations! I can well afford to give you a receipt in full for all that is owing to me; do you mean to refuse it?"

"No," said César; "but that won't keep me from saving up everything to pay you."

"Irrational folly!" cried Pillerault. "In matters of honor I ought to be believed. What nonsense were you saying just now? How have you robbed your creditors when you have paid them all in full?"

César looked earnestly at Pillerault, and Pillerault was touched to see, for the first time in three years, a genuine smile on the face of his poor nephew.

"It is true," he said, "they would be paid; but it would be selling my daughter."

"And I wish to be bought!" cried Césarine, entering with Popinot.

The lovers had heard Birotteau's last words as they came on tiptoe through the antechamber of their uncle's little appartement, Madame Birotteau following. All three had driven round to the creditors who were still unpaid, requesting them to meet at Alexandre Crottat's that evening to receive their money. The all-powerful logic of the enamoured Popinot triumphed in the end over César's scruples, though he persisted for some time in calling himself a debtor, and in declaring that he was circumventing the law by a substitution. But

the refinements of his conscience gave way when Popinot cried out: "Do you want to kill your daughter?"

"Kill my daughter!" said César, thunderstruck.

"Well, then," said Popinot, "I have the right to convey to you the sum which I conscientiously believe to be your share in my profits. Do you refuse it?"

"No," said César.

"Very good; then let us go at once to Crottat and settle the matter, so that there may be no backing out of it. We will arrange about our marriage contract at the same time."

A petition for reinstatement with corroborative documents was at once deposited by Derville at the office of the procureur-général of the Cour royale.

During the month required for the legal formalities and for the publication of the banns of marriage between Césarine and Anselme, Birotteau was a prey to feverish agitation. He was restless. He feared he should not live till the great day when the decree for his vindication would be rendered. His heart throbbed, he said, without cause. He complained of dull pains in that organ, worn out as it was by emotions of sorrow, and now wearied with the rush of excessive joy. Decrees of rehabilitation are so rare in the bankrupt court of Paris that seldom more than one is granted in ten years.

To those persons who take society in its serious aspects, the paraphernalia of justice has a grand and solemn character difficult perhaps to define. Institutions depend altogether on the feelings with which men view them and the degree of grandeur which men's thoughts

attach to them. When there is no longer, we will not say religion, but belief among the people, whenever early education has loosened all conservative bonds by accustoming youth to the practice of pitiless analysis, a nation will be found in process of dissolution; for it will then be held together only by the base solder of material interests, and by the formulas of a creed created by intelligent egotism.

Bred in religious ideas, Birotteau held justice to be what it ought to be in the eyes of men, — a representation of society itself, an august utterance of the will of all, apart from the particular form by which it is expressed. The older, feebler, grayer was the magistrate, the more solemn seemed the exercise of his function, — a function which demands profound study of men and things, which subdues the heart and hardens it against the influence of eager interests. It is a rare thing nowadays to find men who mount the stairway of the old Palais de Justice in the grasp of keen emotions. César Birotteau was one of those men.

Few persons have noticed the majestic solemnity of that stairway, admirably placed as it is to produce a solemn effect. It rises, beyond the outer peristyle which adorns the courtyard of the Palais, from the centre of a gallery leading, at one end, to the vast hall of the Pas Perdus, and at the other to the Sainte-Chapelle, — two architectural monuments which make all buildings in their neighborhood seem paltry. The church of Saint-Louis is among the most imposing edifices in Paris, and the approach to it through this long gallery is at once sombre and romantic. The great hall of the Pas Perdus, on the contrary, presents at the other end

of the gallery a broad space of light; it is impossible to forget that the history of France is linked to those walls. The stairway should therefore be imposing in character; and, in point of fact, it is neither dwarfed nor crushed by the architectural splendors on either side of it. Possibly the mind is sobered by a glimpse, caught through the rich gratings, of the Place du Palais de-Justice, where so many sentences have been executed. The staircase opens above into an enormous space, or antechamber, leading to the hall where the Court holds its public sittings.

Imagine the emotions with which the bankrupt, susceptible by nature to the awe of such accessories, went up that stairway to the hall of judgment, surrounded by his nearest friends, — Lebas, president of the Court of Commerce, Camusot his former judge, Ragon, and Monsieur l'Abbé Loraux his confessor. The pious priest made the splendors of human justice stand forth in strong relief by reflections which gave them still greater solemnity in César's eyes. Pillerault, the practical philosopher, fearing the danger of unexpected events on the worn mind of his nephew, had schemed to prepare him by degrees for the joys of this festal day. Just as César finished dressing, a number of his faithful friends arrived, all eager for the honor of accompanying him to the bar of the Court. The presence of this retinue roused the honest man to an elation which gave him strength to meet the imposing spectacle in the halls of justice. Birotteau found more friends awaiting him in the solemn audience chamber, where about a dozen members of the council were in session.

After the cases were called over, Birotteau's attorney

made his demand for reinstatement in the usual terms. On a sign from the presiding judge, the procureur-général rose. In the name of his office this public prosecutor, the representative of public vindictiveness, asked that honor might be restored to the merchant who had never really lost it, — a solitary instance of such an appeal; for a condemned man can only be pardoned. Men of honor alone can imagine the emotions of César Birotteau as he heard Monsieur de Grandville pronounce a speech, of which the following is an abridgment: —

"Gentlemen," said that celebrated official, "on the 16th of January, 1820, Birotteau was declared a bankrupt by the commercial tribunal of the Seine. His failure was not caused by imprudence, nor by rash speculations, nor by any act that stained his honor. We desire to say publicly that this failure was the result of a disaster which has again and again occurred, to the detriment of justice and the great injury of the city of Paris. It has been reserved for our generation, in which the bitter leaven of republican principles and manners will long be felt, to behold the notariat of Paris abandoning the glorious traditions of preceding centuries, and producing in a few years as many failures as two centuries of the old monarchy had produced. The thirst for gold rapidly acquired has beset even these officers of trust, these guardians of the public wealth, these mediators between the law and the people!"

On this text followed an allocution, in which the Comte de Grandville, obedient to the necessities of his rôle, contrived to incriminate the Liberals, the Bonapartists, and all other enemies of the throne. Subsequent events have proved that he had reason for his apprehensions.

"The flight of a notary of Paris who carried off the funds which Birotteau had deposited in his hands, caused the fall of your petitioner," he resumed. "The Court rendered in that matter a decree which showed to what extent the confidence of Roguin's clients had been betrayed. A *concordat* was held. For the honor of your petitioner, we call attention to the fact that his proceedings were remarkable for a purity not found in any of the scandalous failures which daily degrade the commerce of Paris. The creditors of Birotteau received the whole property, down to the smallest articles that the unfortunate man possessed. They received, gentlemen, his clothes, his jewels, things of purely personal use, — and not only his, but those of his wife, who abandoned all her rights to swell the total of his assets. Under these circumstances Birotteau showed himself worthy of the respect which his municipal functions had already acquired for him; for he was at the time a deputy-mayor of the second arrondissement and had just received the decoration of the Legion of honor, granted as much for his devotion to the royal cause in Vendémiaire, on the steps of Saint-Roch, which were stained with his blood, as for his conciliating spirit, his estimable qualities as a magistrate, and the modesty with which he declined the honors of the mayoralty, pointing out one more worthy of them, the Baron de la Billardière, one of those noble Vendéens whom he had learned to value in the dark days."

"That phrase is better than mine," whispered César to Pillerault.

"At that time the creditors, who received sixty per cent of their claims through the aforesaid relinquishment on the part of this loyal merchant, his wife, and his daughter of all that they possessed, recorded their respect for their debtor in the certificate of bankruptcy granted at the *concordat* which then took place, giving him at the same time a release from

the remainder of their claims. This testimonial is couched in terms which are worthy of the attention of the Court."

Here the procureur-général read the passage from the certificate of bankruptcy.

"After receiving such expressions of good-will, gentlemen, most merchants would have considered themselves released from obligation and free to return boldly into the vortex of business. Far from so doing, Birotteau, without allowing himself to be cast down, resolved within his conscience to toil for the glorious day which has at length dawned for him here. Nothing disheartened him. Our beloved sovereign granted to the man who shed his blood on the steps of Saint-Roch an office where he might earn his bread. The salary of that office the bankrupt laid by for his creditors, taking nothing for his own wants; for family devotion has supported him."

Birotteau pressed his uncle's hand, weeping.

"His wife and his daughter poured their earnings into the common fund, for they too espoused the noble hope of Birotteau. Each came down from the position she had held and took an inferior one. These sacrifices, gentlemen, should be held in honor, for they are harder than all others to bear. I will now show you what sort of task it was that Birotteau imposed upon himself."

Here the procureur-général read a summing-up of the schedule, giving the amounts which had remained unpaid and the names of the creditors.

"Each of these sums, with the interest thereon, has been paid, gentlemen; and the payment is not shown by receipts under private seal, which might be questioned: they are payments made before a notary, properly authenticated; and according to the inflexible requirements of this Court they have

been examined and verified by the proper authority. We now ask you to restore Birotteau, not to honor, but to all the rights of which he was deprived. In doing this you are doing justice. Such exhibitions of character are so rare in this Court that we cannot refrain from testifying to the petitioner how heartily we applaud his conduct, which an august approval has already privately encouraged."

The prosecuting officer closed by reading his charge in the customary formal terms.

The Court deliberated without retiring, and the president rose to pronounce judgment.

"The Court," he said, in closing, "desires me to express to Birotteau the satisfaction with which it renders such a judgment. Clerk, call the next case."

Birotteau, clothed with the caftan of honor which the speech of the illustrious procureur-général had cast about him, stood dumb with joy as he listened to the solemn words of the president, which betrayed the quiverings of a heart beneath the impassibility of human justice. He was unable to stir from his place before the bar, and seemed for a moment nailed there, gazing at the judges with a wondering air, as though they were angels opening to him the gates of social life. His uncle took him by the arm and led him from the hall. César had not as yet obeyed the command of Louis XVIII., but he now mechanically fastened the ribbon of the Legion of honor to his button-hole. In a moment he was surrounded by his friends and borne in triumph down the great stairway to his coach.

"Where are you taking me, my friends?" he said to Joseph Lebas, Pillerault, and Ragon.

"To your own home."

"No; it is only three o'clock. I wish to go to the Bourse, and use my rights."

"To the Bourse!" said Pillerault to the coachman, making an expressive sign to Joseph Lebas, for he saw symptoms in César which led him to fear he might lose his mind.

The late perfumer re-entered the Bourse leaning on the arms of the two honored merchants, his uncle and Joseph Lebas. The news of his rehabilitation had preceded him. The first person who saw them enter, followed by Ragon, was du Tillet.

"Ah! my dear master," he cried, "I am delighted that you have pulled through. I have perhaps contributed to this happy ending of your troubles by letting that little Popinot drag a feather from my wing. I am as glad of your happiness as if it were my own."

"You could not be otherwise," said Pillerault. "Such a thing can never happen to you."

"What do you mean by that?" said du Tillet.

"Oh! all in good part," said Lebas, smiling at the malicious meaning of Pillerault, who, without knowing the real truth, considered the man a scoundrel.

Matifat caught sight of César, and immediately the most noted merchants surrounded him and gave him an *ovation boursière*. He was overwhelmed with flattering compliments and grasped by the hand, which roused some jealousy and caused some remorse; for out of every hundred persons walking about that hall fifty at least had "liquidated" their affairs. Gigonnet and Gobseck, who were talking together in a corner, looked at the man of commercial honor very much as a naturalist must have looked at the first electric-eel

that was ever brought to him, — a fish armed with the power of a Leyden jar, which is the greatest curiosity of the animal kingdom. After inhaling the incense of his triumph, César got into the coach to go to his own home, where the marriage contract of his dear Césarine and the devoted Popinot was ready for signature. His nervous laugh disturbed the minds of the three old friends.

It is a fault of youth to think the whole world vigorous with its own vigor, — a fault derived from its virtues. Youth sees neither men nor things through spectacles; it colors all with the reflex glory of its ardent fires, and casts the superabundance of its own life upon the aged. Like César and like Constance, Popinot held in his memory a glowing recollection of the famous ball. Constance and César through their years of trial had often, though they never spoke of it to each other, heard the strains of Collinet's orchestra, often beheld that festive company, and tasted the joys so swiftly and so cruelly chastised, — as Adam and Eve must have tasted in after times the forbidden fruit which gave both death and life to all posterity; for it appears that the generation of angels is a mystery of the skies.

Popinot, however, could dream of the fête without remorse, nay, with ecstasy. Had not Césarine in all her glory then promised herself to him — to him, poor? During that evening had he not won the assurance that he was loved for himself alone? So when he bought the appartement restored by Grindot, for Célestin, when he stipulated that all should be kept intact, when he religiously preserved the smallest things that once belonged to César and to Constance, he was dreaming of

another ball, — his ball, his wedding-ball! He made loving preparation for it, imitating his old master in necessary expenses, but eschewing all follies, — follies that were now past and done with. So the dinner was to be served by Chevet; the guests were to be mostly the same: the Abbé Loraux replaced the chancellor of the Legion of honor; the president of the Court of Commerce, Monsieur Lebas, had promised to be there; Popinot invited Monsieur Camusot in acknowledgment of the kindness he had bestowed upon Birotteau; Monsieur de Vandenesse and Monsieur de Fontaine took the place of Roguin and his wife. Césarine and Popinot distributed their invitations with much discretion. Both dreaded the publicity of a wedding, and they escaped the jar such scenes must cause to pure and tender hearts by giving the ball on the evening of the day appointed for signing the marriage-contract.

Constance found in her room the gown of cherry velvet in which she had shone for a single night with fleeting splendor. Césarine cherished a dream of appearing before Popinot in the identical ball-dress about which, time and time again, he had talked to her. The appartement was made ready to present to César's eyes the same enchanting scene he had once enjoyed for a single evening. Neither Constance, nor Césarine, nor Popinot perceived the danger to César in this sudden and overwhelming surprise, and they awaited his arrival at four o'clock with a delight that was almost childish.

Following close upon the unspeakable emotion his re-entrance at the Bourse had caused him, the hero of commercial honor was now to meet the sudden shock of felicity that awaited him in his old home. He

entered the house, and saw at the foot of the staircase (still new as he had left it) his wife in her velvet robe, Césarine, the Comte de Fontaine, the Vicomte de Vandenesse, the Baron de la Billardière, the illustrious Vauquelin. A light film dimmed his eyes, and his uncle Pillerault, who held his arm, felt him shudder inwardly.

"It is too much," said the philosopher to the happy lover; "he can never carry all the wine you are pouring out to him."

Joy was so vivid in their hearts that each attributed César's emotion and his stumbling step to the natural intoxication of his feelings, — natural, but sometimes mortal. When he found himself once more in his own home, when he saw his salon, his guests, the women in their ball-dresses, suddenly the heroic measure in the finale of the great symphony rang forth in his head and heart. Beethoven's ideal music echoed, vibrated, in many tones, sounding its clarions through the membranes of the weary brain, of which it was indeed the grand finale.

Oppressed with this inward harmony, César took the arm of his wife and whispered, in a voice suffocated by a rush of blood that was still repressed: "I am not well."

Constance, alarmed, led him to her bedroom; he reached it with difficulty, and fell into a chair, saying: "Monsieur Haudry, Monsieur Loraux."

The Abbé Loraux came, followed by the guests and the women in their ball-dresses, who stopped short, a frightened group. In presence of that shining company César pressed the hand of his confessor and laid his head upon the bosom of his kneeling wife. A vessel

had broken in his breast, and the rush of blood strangled his last sigh.

"Behold the death of the righteous!" said the Abbé Loraux solemnly, pointing to César with the divine gesture which Rembrandt gave to Christ in his picture of the Raising of Lazarus.

Jesus commanded the earth to give up its prey; the priest called heaven to behold a martyr of commercial honor worthy to receive the everlasting palm.

NUCINGEN AND CO.: BANKERS.

To Madame Zulma Carraud.

Surely it is to you, madame, whose lofty and upright mind is like a treasure-house to your friends, to you who have been to me the whole public, and also the most indulgent of sisters, that I ought to dedicate this work. Deign to accept it as testimony to a friendship of which I am proud indeed. You, and other souls noble as your own, will understand my thought as you read this sketch of banking circles following the History of César Birotteau. Is there not in that contrast a complete social lesson?

De Balzac.

NUCINGEN AND CO.: BANKERS.

The World of Leading Bankers.

You know how thin are the partitions which separate the private dining-rooms of the elegant restaurants of Paris. At Véry's, for instance, the largest salon is divided in two by a partition which is removable at will. The scene I am about to relate did not, however, take place there but in another excellent establishment which it suits me not to name. We were two, and like the Prud'homme of Henri Monnier, "I prefer not to compromise her."

We were playing with the delicacies of an exquisite little dinner — exquisite in more senses than one — in a little salon where we spoke in low tones, having recognized the extreme thinness of the partitions. Our roast had come and gone before we had any neighbors in the adjoining room, where we heard only the crackling of the fire. Eight o'clock was striking when a great noise of feet arrived, remarks were ex-

changed, and the waiters brought in lights. It was plain that the salon next to ours was occupied. Recognizing the voices, I knew the sort of personages with whom we had to do.

They were four of the boldest cormorants floating on the foamy crests of the ever-changing waves of our present generation; amiable fellows in their way, whose existence is a problem, who are not known to possess a penny or a bit of land, but who live well. These clever *condottieri* of modern industry (which has become the most cruel of wars) leave anxieties to their creditors, keep pleasures for themselves, and have no care but that of dressing well. Brave enough to smoke, like Jean Bart, on a powder-keg — perhaps to keep up their rôle — more sarcastic than the *petits journaux*, so sarcastic as to scoff at themselves; keen-sighted, disbelieving, grasping and prodigal, priers into all affairs, envious of others but content with themselves, profound politicians by fits and starts, analyzing all things, divining all things, they had not yet been able to force themselves to the light in the social world to which they aspired. Only one among the four had his foot on the ladder — at its lowest rung. This man, named Andoche Finot, little of a talker, cold, fond of good eating, and devoid of mind, had the heart to lay himself flat on his stomach before those who could serve him, and the shrewdness to be insolent to those

whom he did not need. Like one of the clowns in the ballet of "Gustave," he is marquis behind and serf in front.

This industrial prelate keeps a train-bearer, Émile Blondet, a newspaper writer, a man of mental capacity, but loose-ended, brilliant, capable, lazy, knowing the use made of him and letting himself be used, as treacherous as he is kindly out of sheer caprice, a man whom all like and none esteem. Émile is the most attractive of those girl-men of whom a fantastic genius of our day has said: "I should like them better in satin shoes than boots."

The third, named Couture, supports himself by speculating. He grafts one scheme on another scheme; the success of one covers the failure of the other. Thus he manages to keep his head above water, sustained by the nervous force of his play and the audacious rapidity with which he throws the dice. He swims hither and thither, seeking in the vast sea of Parisian self-interests for some islet on which to get a foothold. Evidently he has not yet found it.

As for the last, and the most malicious of the four, his name suffices: Bixiou! Alas! he is no longer the Bixiou of 1825, but he of 1836 — the misanthropic jester noted for his dashing sarcasm; a devil of a fellow maddened by the thought of having spent so much wit to pure waste, furious at not having picked

up his chance in the last revolution, kicking every one right and left like a true Pierrot of the Funambules, knowing his epoch and its scandalous adventures to his fingers' ends and adding diabolical decorations to them, jumping on all shoulders like a clown and trying to leave a mark as red as the brand of the galleys.

After satisfying the first demands of the stomach, our neighbors attained to the period of dinner at which we still remained, namely, the dessert, and thanks to our quiet behavior they thought themselves alone; consequently amid the smoke of cigars and by the help of champagne and the gastronomic amusements of dessert, a free and easy conversation soon began. Stamped by that icy spirit which congeals the most expansive feelings, cuts short all generous inspirations, and gives to laughter itself a certain sharpness, this talk, full of the acrid irony that turns gayety to sneers, will serve to show the exhaustion of souls given over to themselves, without other object than the satisfaction of egotism — the fruit of the peace in which we live. The pamphlet against mankind which Diderot dared not publish, "The Nephew of Rameau," intentionally plain-spoken in its exposures in order to exhibit sores, is alone comparable to the conversation that follows, in which the witty word spared not even that which the thinker was still discussing; where all was destruction and denial and nothing was raised

upon the ruins, and no admiration was felt but for that which scepticism recognizes, namely, the omnipotence, the omniscience, and the omni-convenience of money. After firing for a while broadcast through the ranks of society, malignancy began to shoot down intimate friends; and I confess I felt a desire to listen when Bixiou assumed the leading part. We then heard one of those terrible improvisations to which that artist owes his reputation with certain blaséd minds. Though often, as we shall see, interrupted, renewed and dropped and renewed again, it remains indelibly impressed upon my memory. Opinions and form, all is outside of accepted literary canons. But it is given here such as it was; a pot-pourri of sinister things which depicts our epoch, to which such histories should be told, but the responsibility for which I now leave to the chief narrator. The pantomime and gestures, judging by the frequent changes of voice, by which Bixiou indicated the various interlocutors he put upon the scene, must have been well-nigh perfect, for his three hearers gave vent to approving exclamations, together with interjections of extreme satisfaction.

"And Rastignac refused you?" said Blondet to Finot.

"Point-blank."

"Did n't you threaten him with the newspapers?"

"He laughed at that," replied Finot.

"Rastignac is heir in direct descent of the late de Marsay; he'll make his way in politics as he has in society," said Blondet.

"But how did he make his fortune?" asked Couture. "In 1819 he lived with the illustrious Bianchon in a wretched pension in the Latin quarter. His family ate fried cock-chafers, and drank the lees of the cask to be able to send him a hundred francs a month. His father's property was n't worth three thousand francs a year; he had two sisters and a brother on his shoulders, and now —"

"Now, he has forty thousand francs a year," said Finot, "his two sisters have been well-dowered and married to noblemen, and he has given a life-interest in his father's estate to his mother."

"In 1827," said Blondet, "he still had n't a penny."

"Oh! 1827!" exclaimed Bixiou.

"And now," continued Finot, "we see him on the high-road to be a cabinet minister, peer of France, and anything else he wants to be! It is three years since he ended off suitably with Delphine; he won't marry without good security, and he is likely to get some girl of rank — he! The fellow had excellent good sense to attach a rich woman to him early in life."

"My friends, give him credit for extenuating circumstances," said Blondet, "he fell into the paws of a clever man in escaping the claws of poverty."

"You know Nucingen well," said Bixiou. "In the early days Delphine and Rastignac found him *kind;* a wife seemed to be, for him, a jewel, a decoration of his house. To my mind, that makes him as solidly broad at the base as he is high. Nucingen has made no bones of saying that his wife is the representative of his wealth; *a thing* indispensable, but secondary in the lives of statesmen and financiers. He has said before me that Bonaparte was as stupid as a bourgeois in his first relations to Josephine, and that having had the courage to use her as a stepping-stone he was ridiculous in trying to make a companion of her."

"All superior men ought to cultivate the ideas of the East as to women," said Blondet.

"The banker jumbled Eastern and Western ideas into one delightful Parisian doctrine. He had a horror of de Marsay as not manageable, but Rastignac pleased him much, and he used him so cleverly that Rastignac never suspected it. Nucingen put all the burdens of his household on him. Eugène shouldered Delphine's caprices; he drove her to the Bois, he accompanied her to the theatre. The great little statesman of to-day spent several years of his life in reading and writing pretty notes. He was scolded for nothings; he was lively with Delphine when she was gay, and sad when she was dull; he bore the burden of her headaches and her confidences; he gave up all his life, his hours, his

precious youth to fill the void of the idleness of that woman. Delphine and he used to hold high counsel on which set of jewels or wreaths of flowers suited her best; he drew the fire of all her tantrums and the broadside of her sulks, while, by way of compensation, she was charming to the banker. Nucingen laughed in his sleeve; but if he saw Rastignac giving way under the weight of these burdens he would instantly appear to 'suspect something,' and so reunite the pair by a mutual fear."

"I can understand that a rich woman should have enabled Rastignac to live and live well, but how did he get property?" asked Couture. "A fortune as considerable as the one he now possesses must have been acquired somehow, and no one has ever accused him of doing a sharp stroke of business."

"He inherited," remarked Finot.

"From whom?" asked Blondet.

"Fools, whom he encountered," returned Couture.

"No, he did n't get it all in that way, my good friends," said Bixiou. "I 'll tell you now the origin of his fortune. In the first place, homage to talent! Our friend is not a 'fellow' as Finot called him, but a gentlemar who can play his game and knows his cards, a man whom the gallery respects. Rastignac has all the talent that he needs at a given moment, like a soldier who invests his courage only at ninety days' sight,

three signatures and securities. He seems overbearing, unreasonable, without connected ideas, without steadiness of purpose, without fixed opinions; but, let some serious affair arise, some scheme to be managed, and Rastignac won't scatter himself, like Blondet here! who 'll argue the other side for the benefit of his neighbor: no, Rastignac gathers himself up, concentrates his forces, studies the point on which he ought to charge and does charge on the double-quick. With Murat's valor he breaks the enemy's square, and down go stockholders, bondholders, and all the rest of the concern. Then, having made his opening, he retires into his easy-going careless life, he becomes once more the Southerner, the voluptuary, the idle talker, the lazy Rastignac, who can afford to get up at midday because he did n't go to bed till the crisis was over."

"That 's all very well, but get to his fortune," put in Finot.

"Bixiou will make a joke of it," said Blondet; "I 'll tell you; Eugène's fortune is — Delphine de Nucingen, a remarkable woman who unites audacity to foresight."

"Did she ever lend you money?" asked Bixiou.

The laugh was general at this.

"You are very much mistaken about her," said Couture to Blondet, "her cleverness consists in making speeches that are more or less piquant, in loving Rastignac with embarrassing fidelity, and in obeying him blindly — she 's an Italian sort of woman."

"*Plus* money," said Finot sourly.

"Come, come," resumed Bixiou in a persuasive tone. "after what we have been saying why find fault with that poor Rastignac for living at the expense of the house of Nucingen, and being 'put in his furniture,' as the saying is, neither more nor less than La Torpille by our friend des Lupeaulx? — you are falling into the vulgarity of the rue Saint-Denis. In the first place, speaking in the abstract, as Royer-Collard says, the question can bear the examination of pure reason; as for impure reason —"

"There he goes!" said Finot to Blondet.

"He's right," cried Blondet. "The question is a very old one; it caused the famous duel between La Châtaigneraie and Jarnac which gave a saying to France. Jarnac was accused of being on good terms with his mother-in-law, who supplied the luxuries of her beloved son. When a fact is true, it ought never to be told. By way of devotion to King Henri II., who allowed himself to repeat this gossip, La Châtaigneraie took that royal indiscretion on himself. Hence the duel, which has enriched the French language with the saying: *Coup de Jarnac.*"

"Ah! if that saying has such a long descent it must be noble!" said Finot.

"No wonder you were ignorant of it in your former capacity as editor of reviews and newspapers," said Blondet.

"There are women," continued Bixiou gravely, "and also there are men who are able to divide their lives and give out but one part of them (observe that I phrase my opinion according to the humanitarian formula). To such persons all material interests are external to sentiment. They give their lives, their time, their honor to a woman, and think it is not becoming to confuse the matter with material questions. Reciprocally, these men accept nothing from a woman. Yes, all becomes dishonorable if there's any question of interests as well as of souls. This doctrine is much professed, but it is n't often applied."

"Ho!" said Blondet, "what nonsense! The Maréchal de Richelieu, who understood gallantry pretty well, gave Madame de la Popelinière a pension of twenty thousand francs the day after the affair of the chimney-back. Agnes Sorel carried her whole fortune artlessly to Charles VII., and the king took it. Jacques Cœur preserved the crown of France, which allowed him to do so and was afterwards as ungrateful as a woman."

"Messieurs," said Bixiou, "all love which does not involve indissoluble friendship seems to m mere passing licentiousness. What is entire self-abandonment if you keep back anything? Between the two doctrines, equally opposed and equally immoral the one as the other, there is no agreement possible. In

my opinion, those persons who fear a perfect and complete bond expect it to come to an end, and if so, adieu illusion! A love which does not consider itself eternal is hideous (that 's pure Fénelon). Now, persons to whom the world is known, observers, well-bred, well-gloved and well-cravatted men, who think it no shame to marry a woman for her money, proclaim, as indispensable, a total severing of self-interests and sentiments. The rest are fools who love and who think themselves alone in the world with their mistresses. To them, millions are mud; the glove, the camellia, worn by the idol are worth many millions. Though you will not find in their possession any of the squandered filthy lucre, you 'll find faded flowers carefully put away in cedar boxes. Such lovers are one; for them there 's no *I*. THOU is their incarnate Word. What of it? Would you try to cure this folly of the heart? There are fools who love without any calculation; there are wise men who calculate in loving."

"Bixiou is sublime," cried Blondet. "What say you, Finot?"

"Elsewhere," replied Finot, settling down in his cravat, "I should say what gentlemen say; but here I think —"

"Like the rascally scamps with whom you have the honor of dining," interposed Bixiou.

"Faith, yes," returned Finot.

"And you?" said Bixiou to Couture.

"All rubbish," cried Couture, "the woman who isn't willing to make herself a stepping-stone for the man she loves to rise by is a woman who has no heart except for herself."

"And you, Blondet?"

"I — oh! I practise, I don't argue."

"Well!" resumed Bixiou in his most sarcastic voice. "Rastignac did not agree with you. To take all and render nothing is horrid and even scandalous; but to take like the lord in the Bible and return a hundredfold, is a chivalrous thing to do. So thought Rastignac. Rastignac was profoundly humiliated by his community of interests with Delphine de Nucingen. I can speak of his regrets, for I have seen him with tears in his eyes (after supper, of course) deploring his position. Yes, he really wept! Well, now, according to you —"

"Look here! are you making fun of us?" asked Finot.

"Not the least in the world. I'm talking of Rastignac, whose grief, according to you, was a proof of his corruption, for by that time he cared much less for Delphine. But so it was; the poor fellow had that thorn in his heart. You see, he's a profoundly depraved nobleman while we are virtuous artists. So Rastignac wanted to enrich Delphine, he

poor, she rich! and — will you believe it? — he succeeded. Rastignac, who would have fought like Jarnac, went over to the opinion of Henri II. as expressed in that great saying of his: 'There is no absolute virtue; only circumstances.' All this belongs to the history of his fortune."

"You had better begin your tale instead of inducing us to calumniate ourselves,' said Blondet, with gracious good-humor.

"Ha! ha! my boy," said Bixiou, baptizing him with a tap on the skull, "the champagne is beginning to work."

"By the sacred name of Stockholder, I conjure you, relate your tale!" said Couture.

"I was just within a peg of it," retorted Bixiou, "but that oath of yours puts me at the end of it."

"Are there stockholders in the story?" asked Finot.

"Yes, and as rich as *yours*," replied Bixiou.

"It seems to me," said Finot in a sulky tone, "that you owe some consideration to a good fellow who lends you on occasion five hundred francs —"

"Waiter!" cried Bixiou.

"What do you want of the waiter?" asked Blondet.

"Five hundred francs to return them to Finot, to free my tongue and tear up my note of hand."

"Tell your tale," said Finot, affecting to laugh.

"I take you all to witness," said Bixiou, "that I

don't belong to that impertinent fellow who thinks my silence is worth only five hundred francs. You 'll never be minister if you don't learn to gauge consciences — Well, yes! my old Finot," he added in a coaxing tone, "I'll tell the story without any personalities, and we 'll call it quits."

"He is going to prove to us," said Couture, laughing, "that Nucingen made Rastignac's fortune."

"You are not so far wrong as you think," returned Bixiou. "You don't know what Nucingen is, financially speaking."

"And you don't know yourself one word about his beginnings," said Blondet.

"I have only known him in his own house," said Bixiou, "but we may have known each other as highwaymen in former worlds."

"The prosperity of the banking-house of Nucingen is one of the extraordinary phenomena of our times," continued Blondet. "In 1804, Nucingen was little known; the bankers of those days would have trembled to find three hundred thousand francs of his acceptances on the market. This grand financier was fully aware of his inferiority. How could he make himself known? He suspended payment. Good! His name, hitherto confined to Strasburg and the faubourg Poissonière, echoed through the markets. He bought out the interests of his clients with depreciated

securities and resumed payment; his paper was taken at once throughout all France. By rare good luck the depreciated property revived and became profitable. Nucingen was at once in demand. The year 1815 came; the fellow gathered in his capital, bought into the Funds before the battle of Waterloo, suspended payment at the moment of the crisis, liquidated his debts with stock of the mines of Wortschin which he had bought at twenty per cent below the value at which he now issued them. Yes, gentlemen, that is true. He took one hundred and fifty thousand bottles of champagne from old Grandet to cover himself, foreseeing the failure of that virtuous father of the present Comte d'Aubrion, and as much more from Duberghe in Bordeaux wines. These three hundred thousand *accepted* bottles — accepted, my friends, at thirty sous — he made the Allies drink at six francs a bottle in the Palais Royal between 1817 and 1819. The paper of the house of Nucingen and its name became at once European. This illustrious baron rose on the very wave which engulfed others. Twice his liquidation has been of immense advantage to his creditors: attempt to cheat them? oh, impossible. He passes for the most honest financier in the world. At his third suspension the paper of the house of Nucingen will be taken in Asia, Mexico, Australia, among savages. Ouvrard is the only man who has fathomed this Alsa-

cian, the son of some Jew converted by ambition. 'When Nucingen lets go his gold,' said he, 'you may be sure he is grabbing diamonds.'"

"His crony, du Tillet, is the same," said Finot. "In the matter of birth du Tillet has only that which was indispensable to existence, and yet he, who had n't a farthing in 1814, has become what you now see him. And, moreover, he has made what none of us (I don't speak of you, Couture) have been able to make, and that is friends instead of enemies. In fact he has so carefully concealed his antecedents, that it was necessary to grub in the gutter to find out that he was once a clerk with a perfumer in the rue Saint-Honoré as late as 1814."

"Ta, ta, ta!" cried Bixiou, "don't compare Nucingen to a villanous little swindler like du Tillet, a jackal who hunts by his nose, scents a dead body and gets there in time to snatch the biggest bone. Just look at the two men — one with the pointed face of a cat, thin, sinewy, made for springing; the other cubic, fat, heavy as a sack, immovable as a diplomatist. Nucingen has the lynx eye that never glitters; his depths are not before him but behind him; he is impenetrable, you'll never see him coming. Whereas du Tillet's wiliness resembles, as Napoleon said of somebody, I forget who, thread spun so fine that it breaks."

"I can't see that Nucingen has any other advantage over du Tillet than the good sense of knowing that a financier ought never to be more than a baron; whereas du Tillet is trying to get himself made a count in Italy," said Blondet.

"Blondet! one word, my boy," cried Couture. "In the first place Nucingen was bold enough to say that no man is honest except in appearance; and next, you can never know him unless you see him in business. Banking, with him, is only one department and a small one: he furnishes the government, he trades in wines, wools, indigo, in short in anything where he sees a chance of gain. His genius takes hold of all things. That elephant of finance would sell the deputies to the ministry, the Greeks to the Turks if he could. To him, commerce is, as Cousin would say, the totality of varieties, the unity of specialties. A banking business thus regarded becomes a great policy; it requires a powerful head, and leads a man of nerve to put himself above the laws of probity by which he finds himself hampered."

"You are right, my son," said Blondet. "But we outsiders can see that all that means war in the world of money. The banker is a conqueror who sacrifices great masses to reach some results; his soldiers thus sacrificed are the interests of individuals. He has his stratagems to plan, his ambushes to set, his partisans

to send into the field and his cities to capture. Most of these men are so close to politics that they end by taking part in them and then their fortunes succumb. The firm of Necker came to grief in this way, and the famous Samuel Bernard was almost ruined. In every generation we find some banker of colossal fortune who leaves behind him neither fortune nor successor. The Brothers Pâris, who contributed to pull down Law, and Law himself (beside whom all those who start associations with stocks are pygmies) Bouret, Baujon, all have disappeared and have left neither family nor representative behind them. Like Time, the bank devours its own children. In order to preserve himself the banker should be ennobled, should found a dynasty, like those money-lenders to Charles V., the Fuggers, created Princes of Babenhausen, who still exist — in the almanac of Gotha. The bank does in fact seek nobility from the instinct of preservation, without perhaps really knowing it. Jacques Cœur made a great firm noble, that of Noirmoutier, which became extinct under Louis XIII. What energy there was in that man! ruined for having made a legitimate king! He died a prince on an island of the Archipelago where he had erected a magnificent cathedral."

"*Ah ça!* you are going to give us a course of history, and take us out of the present day when the throne is deprived of the right of conferring nobility

and can only make barons behind closed doors — more's the pity!" said Finot.

"You regret the days when titles could be bought," said Bixiou, "and right enough too. However, let us go back to our mutton. Do you know Beaudenord? No, no, no. Heavens, how all things pass! That poor lad was the flower of dandyism ten years ago. But he has been so sucked under that none of you know him any more than Finot knew the origin of the 'coup de Jarnac.' (I did n't say that to tease you, Finot.) Well, he belonged to the faubourg Saint-Germain. Beaudenord is the first person that I shall bring upon the scene. His name was Godefroid de Beaudenord. Neither Finot, nor Blondet, nor Couture, nor I, will deny the advantage of such a name. That fellow's vanity never suffered at hearing his servants called up after a ball in presence of a score of pretty women in their hoods and mantles waiting for their carriages. Also he was in full enjoyment of all the parts and members which God has bestowed upon man; sound and whole, no specks on the eye, no false locks, no false calves, his knees did n't knock in, nor his legs bow out; spine bone straight, waist slim, hand white and well-shaped, black hair, complexion neither rosy like that of a grocer's boy nor brown like that of a Calabrese peasant. And finally — a thing essential! Beaudenord was not too handsome, like some of my

friends who look as if they made capital of their beauty because they have n't any other — but we won't go back to that subject; we have said enough, and it is infamous. Beaudenord was a good shot, rode a horse well, fought a duel for a mere trifle and did not kill his adversary. Do you know that in order to understand in what happiness, pure, unalloyed, unmixed happiness consists in the nineteenth century — and the happiness, mind you, of a young man of twenty-six — you must look at the infinitely small things of life. The bootmaker had caught the shape of Beaudenord's foot and shod him well. The tailor liked to clothe him. Beaudenord neither lisped nor rolled his r's, nor bragged, nor talked Norman; he spoke pure, correct French, and wore his cravat properly — like Finot there. Cousin by marriage to the Marquis d'Aiglemont, his guardian (he was orphaned of both father and mother, another cause of happiness), he could go, and did go into the banking set, without the faubourg Saint-Germain blaming him; for, happily, a young man has the right to make pleasure his only law, to go where he gets amusement, and to fly the gloomy corners where dulness reigns. In short, he had been vaccinated (you understand me, Blondet?). But in spite of all these advantages he might have been very unhappy. Ha! ha! happiness has the misfortune to seem to signify something positive; and this leads many a fool

to ask: 'What is happiness?' A very clever woman once said: 'Happiness is where you put it.'"

"She told a sad truth," said Blondet.

"And a moral one," added Finot.

"Archi-moral! HAPPINESS, like VIRTUE, like EVIL, expresses something relative," said Blondet. "Even La Fontaine hoped that in course of time the souls in hell would get accustomed to their position and end by living in a sea of flames like fishes in water. The happiness of a man of twenty-six who lives in Paris is n't that of a man of twenty-six who lives in Blois. Those who start from that fact to declaim against the instability of opinions are cheats or fools. The science of modern medicine, the greatest glory of which is to have passed between 1799 and 1837 from a state of conjecture to a state of positive knowledge (and *that* through the influence of the great analytical school of Paris), has proved that within certain periods of time, man is completely renovated —"

"After the fashion of Jeannot's knife, and you think him always the same," put in Bixiou. "So, then, there are patches of various colors in that harlequin's-coat we call happiness? However, that of my Godefroid had neither holes nor spots. A young man of twenty-six, happy in love — that is to say, who is loved, not for his flowery youth, nor for his wit or his mind, nor yet for his figure, but irresistibly, not even for love's sake,

but loved even where love is abstract (to quote the excellent Royer-Collard once more) the said young man can very well afford not to have a penny in the purse that the beloved object has knit for him, he can owe rent to his landlord, he need n't pay his bootmaker or his tailor, who will end by hating him; in short, he can very well be poor! Poverty, I admit, spoils the happiness of a young man who does not have our transcendent views on the fusion of interests. I don't know anything more wearing than to be morally very happy and materially very miserable. It is like having one leg frozen, as mine is just now by the draught from that door, and the other broiling in a furnace. I hope I make myself understood; there 's an echo to my words under your waistcoat pocket, Blondet! Between ourselves it is best to get rid of hearts, they spoil minds. To continue: Godefroid de Beaudenord possessed, at the time I speak of, the respect of his tradesmen, and his tradesmen possessed his money with some regularity. The clever woman whom I have already quoted and whose name cannot be mentioned because, thanks to her want of heart, she still lives —"

"Who is she?"

"The Marquise d'Espard. She said that a young man ought to live in an *entresol,* have nothing about him that resembles a home, — neither cook nor kitchen, nothing but an old man to wait on him, — and make

no pretensions to stability. According to her, every other sort of bachelor establishment is in bad taste. Godefroid de Beaudenord, faithful to that programme, lived on the quai Malaquais, in an *entresol*, where he had so little similitude with married people that he slept on a camp-bed almost too narrow to manage to stay upon it. An Englishwoman, entering by accident, would have found nothing 'improper' there. Finot, get some one to explain to you the great law of the 'improper' which rules England. But stay, as you and I are now bound by the sacred tie of a thousand-franc note, I'll give you an idea of it myself. I've been in England" (in a whisper to Blondet: "I'm going to give him knowledge worth *two* thousand francs"). "In England, Finot, you become quite intimate with a lady during the evening, at a ball or elsewhere; you meet her the next day in the street, and you assume to recognize her — *improper!* You find at dinner, under the swallow-tail of your left-hand neighbor, a charming fellow, witty, no arrogance, free and easy, nothing of the Englishman about him. According to the laws of French polite society, so affable, so friendly, you speak to him — *improper!* You approach a pretty woman at a ball and ask her to dance: *improper!* You get excited, you talk, you laugh, you put your heart, your soul, your mind into the conversation; you express sentiments; you play when you hold

your cards, you talk when you talk, you eat when you eat, — all improper! improper! improper! One of the wittiest and also one of the profoundest minds of this century, Stendhal, has admirably characterized the 'Improper' by stating that there is a lord in Great Britain who, when alone, dares not cross his legs before the fire for fear of being *improper*. An English lady, even if she belongs to the Sacred Army of Bigots (intolerant Protestants, who would let their daughters die of hunger if they were *improper*), would not be *improper* herself in playing the devil in her own bedroom, but would think herself lost if she openly received a gentleman in it. Thanks to the Improper, we shall some day find London and its inhabitants petrified."

"When one thinks of the ninnies in France who want to import the solemn stupidities which Englishmen perform with that fine imperturbability we are all aware of," said Blondet, "it is enough to make one shudder. Walter Scott, in his last years, who dared not picture women as they are for fear of being thought *improper*, expressed regret for having drawn that beautiful figure of Effie in the 'Heart of Midlothian.'"

"Do you want to make sure of not being *improper* in England?" said Bixiou to Finot.

"How?" said Finot.

"Go to the Tuileries and look at a sort of fireman

in marble, called Themistocles by the sculptor, and then try to walk like the Statue of the Commander, and you 'll never be *improper*. Well, it was through a vigorous application of the law of the Improper that Godefroid's happiness was made complete. His tiger was a little Irish boy, called Paddy, Joby, Toby (what you like) three feet high, twenty inches wide, face of a weasel, steel nerves soaked in gin, active as a squirrel, able to drive a phaeton with a dexterity that was never at a loss in London or Paris, riding a horse like old Franconi, eye of a lizard (as keen as mine), rosy cheeks and blond hair like that of Raffaelle's Madonnas, deceitful as a prince, knowing as an elderly lawyer, and ten years of age, — in short, a perfect flower of depravity, gambling, swearing, greedy for sugar-plums and punch, insulting as a newspaper article, bold and pilfering as a *gamin de Paris*. He had been the glory and the profit of a celebrated English nobleman, for whom he had won over seven hundred thousand francs as a jockey. The lord was fond of him; his tiger was a curiosity; no one in London possessed such a tiny tiger. Perched on a race-horse, Joby Toby looked like a falcon. Well, the time came when the lord dismissed Toby Joby, not for greediness, not for theft, nor murder, nor criminal conversation, nor for ill-behavior, insolence to milady, or rifling the pockets of milady's maid, not even for taking bribes from

milord's rivals on the race-course, or for amusing himself on Sundays, — in short, not for any reprehensible action. Paddy could have done all those things, he might even have spoken to milord without being spoken to, and milord would have pardoned him that domestic crime. Milord would have borne many things from Toby, so much did he value him. The boy could drive a two-wheeled cart tandem, or ride the leader, his feet not reaching the shafts, and he himself looking like one of those angels' heads the Venetian painters group around the feet of the Father Eternal. An English journalist bethought him of giving a delightful description of this little angel; he said he was too pretty for a tiger and offered to bet he was a tamed tigress. The saying went round; it grew venomous and spiteful, and finally became in the highest degree *improper*. The superlative of the *improper* leads to the scaffold. Milord dismissed Toby and was highly praised by milady for his discretion. Toby could get no situation, his status in Britannic zoölogy being thus contested. In those days Godefroid was flourishing at the French embassy in London, where he heard of Joby Toby Paddy's misadventure. The diplomat went in search of the tiger, whom he found weeping while he devoured a pot of jam; for the little rascal had already squandered the guineas with which milord had gilded the blow. Thus it happened that on his return to France, Godefroid

brought among us the most charming tiger of all England; he was known by his tiger, as Couture here is remarked for his waistcoats. He was received at once into the confederation of the club known to-day by the name of 'de Grammont.' After renouncing the diplomatic career he alarmed no ambitions, his wit was not dangerous, and society welcomed him cordially. We, my friends, would have our vanity deeply hurt if we encountered only smiling faces; we like to see the bitter grin of envious souls. But Godefroid did not like to be hated. Every man to his taste! Now let's come to the solid — to material life. His apartment, where I've done justice to many a breakfast, was noted for a mysterious dressing-room, very ornate, full of comfortable things, a fireplace, a bath-tub, a secret staircase, muffled doors, easy locks, discreet hinges, windows of ground glass, curtains impenetrable. Though the bedroom presented a scene of the choicest disorder that the most ardent painter in water-color could possibly have desired, and everything in it smacked of the Bohemian life of an elegant young man, the dressing-room, on the contrary, was like a sanctuary, — white, clean, neat, warm, no draughts, carpet on which to walk with bare feet. That's the sign-manual of a bachelor who is really a dandy and understands living. A shrewd old man-servant, very clever in veterinary art, took care of the horses and groomed

Godefroid. He formerly belonged to the late Monsieur de Beaudenord, and felt for Godefroid an inveterate affection, — that *heart-sickness* which, alas! the savings-banks have now contrived to cure among servants. All material happiness rests on figures. You, to whom Parisian life is known to its every exostosis, you are aware that having seventeen francs to pay in taxes, and any amount of fancies, Godefroid needed seventeen thousand francs a year to meet his expenses. Well, my dear friends, I ought to have told you before that the day when he got out of bed a man, having attained his majority, the Marquis d'Aiglemont, his guardian, brought him his account, and handed over an investment on the Grand-Livre which gave him eighteen thousand francs a year, — the remains of the paternal opulence skimped by the great republican reduction, and riddled by Imperial arrears. His virtuous guardian also put him in possession of thirty thousand francs, saved during his minority and lying in the banking-house of Nucingen; telling him, with the grace of a great seigneur and the free and easy tone of a soldier of the Empire, that he had laid by that sum for the follies of youth. 'If you will listen to me, Godefroid,' said the marquis, 'instead of spending that money foolishly like so many others, spend it on useful follies; accept the post of attaché to an embassy in Turin, go from there to Naples, from Naples return to

London, and you will have got both amusement and instruction for your money. Later, if you want to take a career, you will not have wasted either your time or your means.' The late Aiglemont was worth more than his reputation, which can't be said for any of us."

"A young man who starts in life at twenty-one with eighteen thousand francs a year is ruined," said Couture.

"Unless he is a miser, or a very superior being," said Blondet.

"Godefroid sojourned in all the four capitals of Italy," continued Bixiou. "He saw Germany and England, a little of St. Petersburg, and went through Holland; but he parted with his thirty thousand francs as if he had thirty thousand francs a year. He lived everywhere on *suprême de volaille*, aspic jelly, and French wines, spoke his own tongue in all countries and heard no other; in short, he virtually never left Paris. He would gladly have depraved his heart and hardened it, lost his illusions, learned to hear all things without blushing, to talk without saying anything, and penetrate the secret interests of the great powers — Pooh! he could hardly provide himself with four tongues; I mean, lay in four words about an idea. He returned to France, the widower of several wearisome dowagers (they call them *bonnes fortunes* in foreign lands), still

timid and quite unformed; a good fellow, very trustful, incapable of saying harm of the persons who admitted him to their houses and with far too much good faith to be a diplomatist, — in short, what we should call a loyal soul."

"In other words a *muff*, who held his eighteen thousand francs a year at the mercy of the first speculator," said Couture.

"That devil of a Couture is so in the habit of anticipating dividends that he anticipates the end of my history," cried Bixiou. "Where was I? Oh! Beaudenord's return. When he was installed, as I have told you, on the quai Malaquais it appeared that a thousand francs a year more than he had would just be insufficient to pay for his share of a box at the two Opera-houses. When he lost twenty-five or thirty louis at cards or in a bet, of course he paid; but if he won, he spent them all the same; just as *we* should do if we were fools enough to let ourselves bet. Beaudenord, pinched for money in spite of his eighteen thousand francs a year, felt the necessity of creating what we call to-day a 'margin.' He was very desirous not to get himself into difficulties. He went to his late guardian and consulted him. 'My dear boy,' said d'Aiglemont, 'the Funds are now at par; sell out; I've sold my shares and my wife's. Nucingen has my whole capital and gives me six per

cent. Do as I do; you 'll get one per cent more; and one per cent is enough to put you completely at your ease.' In three days Godefroid was 'at his ease.' His revenues being in perfect equilibrium with his wants, his happiness was, very naturally, perfect. If it were possible to interrogate all young men in Paris with a single look, as it appears will be the case in the Last Judgment with the millions of generations which have swarmed in this universe and all other globes as national guards or savages — if, I say, we could ask those young men whether the joys of twenty-six years of age do not consist in riding on horseback, driving a tilbury, or a cabriolet, with a tiger no bigger than my thumb and fresh and rosy as Paddy Joby Toby; in appearing elegantly clothed according to the vestimental laws which rule at eight in the morning, midday, four in the afternoon, and at night; in being received at all the embassies, and gathering there the ephemeral flowers of superficial and cosmopolitan friendships; in carrying their names, clothes, and heads with becoming dignity; in living in a charming little *entresol* like that I have described; in being able to invite friends to the Rocher de Cancale without previously consulting their waistcoat pockets, and having always for themselves a good nap on their hats, what would be their reply? We ourselves, being superior men, would all declare that such happiness

was incomplete; that it was like the Madeleine without an altar; that in order to be happy one must love or be loved, or love without being loved, or be loved without loving, or be able to love right and left anyhow. Let us therefore drop material happiness and get to moral happiness. When, in January, 1823, Godefroid found himself firmly poised in all his enjoyments, having voice and footing in the various Parisian societies where it pleased him to go, he felt the necessity of sheltering himself under the protection of a parasol; in other words, he resolved to betake himself, sentiments, ideas, affections, and all, to a woman, *a woman!* WOMAN! AH! At first he conceived the gloomy idea of having a hopeless passion; and he hovered for a time round his handsome cousin, Madame d'Aiglemont, without perceiving that a diplomatist was already her Faust in a waltz. The year 1825 went by in attempts, searches, and useless coquetries. The beloved object did not appear. Passions are extremely rare. In these days as many barricades are set up in manners and morals as in the streets! Just as I told you, my brethren, the Improper is getting a hold upon us! Well, to cut my story shorter, I won't inflict upon you a detailed description of the person in whom Godefroid at last recognized his mate. Age, nineteen; height, one metre fifty centimetres; fair hair, *idem* eyelashes, blue eyes, medium forehead, arched nose, small mouth,

short chin rather prominent, oval face; particular marks or signs, none. There you have the passport descriptive list of the beloved object. Don't be more exacting than the police, the mayors of towns and villages in France, and all gendarmes and other constituted authorities. Besides, that's the rough block of the Venus de' Medici, give you my word. Well, the first time Godefroid went to one of those balls of Madame de Nucingen by which she has acquired, cheaply enough, a certain reputation, he saw, in a quadrille, the Person to love, and was rapt in admiration of that tiny figure. The blond hair rippled in cascades of gold on a fresh and innocent young head, like that of a naiad stooping to the crystal fountain at its source to gaze at the flowers of her springtide (that's the new style of writing, — phrases, you know, that slip along like the macaroni we ate just now). You all know the effect of fair hair and blue eyes combined with the soft, languorous, but decent movements of a waltz. A girl of that sort does not strike you audaciously on the heart like the brunettes who seem to say by a look, as the Spanish beggars do, 'Your money or your life; five francs or I despise you.' Those insolent beauties (they are not dangerous) may please some men, but in my opinion the fair one who has the luck to seem excessively tender and complying, and yet not lose her rights of teasing, nagging, endless argument, pretended

jealousy, — in fact, all that makes women so adorable, — is more sure of being married than the brunette. Isaure, — that was the name of the beloved object, — white as an Alsacian (she was born in Strasburg and spoke German with a delightful little French accent), danced charmingly. Her feet, not mentioned by the bye in her descriptive list, though they might have found their proper place under the rubric of 'particular signs,' were remarkable for their smallness and for a certain peculiar motion which the old dancing-masters used to call *flic-flac:* a quality also found in the charming utterance of Mademoiselle Mars, — for the Muses are sisters; the dancer and the poet both touch earth with their feet. Isaure's feet spoke with a nicety, a precision, a lightness, a rapidity, which augured well of the things of her heart 'She has *flic-flac!*' was the high praise of Marcel, the only dancing-master who ever deserved to be called great. People said in those days 'the great Marcel,' as they said 'the great Frederick,' in Frederick the Great's day."

"Did he ever compose a ballet?" asked Finot.

"Yes; something like 'The Four Elements.' But Isaure did n't dance on the points of her toes; she stayed on the ground, and swayed to the music without pirouettes, neither more nor less voluptuously than is becoming in a young lady. Marcel used to say with

profound philosophy that every phase of life had its own dance: a married woman danced differently from a young girl, a lawyer from a financier, a soldier from a court page; he even went so far as to declare that an infantry officer ought to dance differently from a cavalry officer; starting from that point he analyzed society. — But all those fine shades of discrimination are far away from us now."

"Ah!" said Blondet, "there you lay your finger on a great misfortune. If France had understood Marcel the French Revolution would never have taken place."

"Godefroid," pursued Bixiou, "did not have the advantage of roaming over Europe without observing carefully the dances of foreign lands. Without that profound knowledge of choregraphy (called futile!) he might never have loved this young person; but of all the three hundred guests assembled that evening at the Nucingen ball he was the only one to understand the love, unuttered but betrayed, that talking feet could tell. It is true that Isaure d'Aldrigger's method of dancing was observed by others, but in these days when we glide over the surface of things and dwell on nothing, one said: 'There's a girl who dances wonderfully well' (he was the clerk of a notary); another said: 'That little person knows how to dance' (this was a lady in a turban); the third, a woman of thirty: 'There's a little person who does n't dance badly.' — But

to return to Marcel; I parody his famous speech: 'How many things there are in a forward-and-back!' "

"Come, get on a little faster," said Blondet; "you are spinning it out too fine."

"Isaure," resumed Bixiou, with an oblique glance at Blondet, "was wearing a simple gown of white crape with green ribbons, a camellia in her hair, a camellia at her belt, a camellia on the hem of her dress, a camellia — "

"Here come Sancho's three hundred goats!"

"This is literature, my dear fellow. 'Clarissa' is a masterpiece; it has fourteen volumes, but an obtuse vaudevillist will tell it you all in one act. Provided I amuse you, what are you growling about? I 'm explaining this toilet, which was really delicious; don't you like camellias? would you rather have dahlias? No. Well, then, take a marron glacé, — here!" and Bixiou must have thrown a marron to Blondet, for we heard it fall upon his plate.

"Well, go on; I was wrong," said Blondet.

"I resume," continued Bixiou. "'Would n't she be nice to marry?' said Rastignac to Beaudenord, pointing out to him the girl with the white camellias. (Rastignac was one of Godefroid's intimates.) 'That 's just what I was thinking,' replied Godefroid in his ear. 'I was saying to myself that instead of trembling all the time about one's happiness, hardly able to slip a

word into inattentive ears, looking to see at the opera if there's a red flower or a white one in somebody's hair, a gloved hand on the side of a carriage in the Bois (as at Milan on the Corso); instead of stealing a sweetmeat behind a door, like a footman drinking the lees of a bottle; instead of wasting one's intellect on sending and receiving a letter like a postman; instead of obtaining infinite tenderness in two lines to-day, five volumes in folio to-morrow, an edition in two pages the day after, — fluctuations which are fatiguing, — how much better to go in for the grand passion envied by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and love, out and out, a young person like Isaure, with the intention of making her one's wife if, after an exchange of sentiments, hearts agree, — in short, be a happy Werther!' 'That's an absurdity like others,' said Rastignac, without laughing. 'In your place perhaps even I should plunge into the infinite delights of such asceticism — it is new, original, and it won't cost much. Your Monna Lisa is sweet, but silly as the music of a ballet; I warn you of that.' The way in which Rastignac uttered the last sentence made Beaudenord fancy that his friend had some reason for wishing to disenchant him. His diplomatic habits made him scent a rival — it is strange how missed vocations color our lives! Godefroid proceeded to fall in love with Mademoiselle Isaure d'Aldrigger so palpably that Rastignac

went in search of a tall girl, who was talking with some one in the cardroom, to whom he whispered: ‘ Malvina, your sister has caught a fish in her net weighing eighteen thousand francs a year; he has a name, and a certain position in the world, also a good appearance; watch them; if they go in for perfect love, make yourself Isaure's confidante, and don't let her write a single word until you have corrected it.’ About two o'clock in the morning, a footman came up to a little creature, looking like a Swiss shepherdess, forty years of age and coquettish as Zerlina in the opera of Don Juan, near to whom Isaure was standing. ‘Madame la baronne's carriage waits,’ said the man; and Godefroid then saw his German beauty leading her fantastic mother toward the antechamber, followed by Malvina. Godefroid, who pretended (simpleton!) to go and see what mischief Toby was after, had the happiness of beholding Isaure and Malvina bundling up their simpering mamma in a fur pelisse, and rendering each other those little services required by a nocturnal trip through Paris. The two sisters examined him from the corners of their eyes like well-trained cats watching a mouse without appearing to see it. He took much satisfaction in observing the tone, manners, and livery of the tall Alsacian who, with his well-gloved hands, put on the furred overshoes of his three ladies. Never were two sisters so unlike as Isaure and Malvina.

Malvina, the elder, was tall and brown, Isaure, tiny and fair; the features of the latter were refined and delicate; those of the former, vigorous and strongly marked. Isaure was a type of the woman who reigns by want of strength, whom a mere school-boy feels himself called on to protect; Malvina was the woman of *Avez-vous vu dans Barcelone?* Beside her sister, Isaure had the effect of a miniature near a portrait in oils. 'She is rich!' said Godefroid to Rastignac, re-entering the ballroom. — 'Who?' — 'That young girl.' — 'Oh! Isaure d'Aldrigger. Of course she is. The mother is a widow; her husband employed Nucingen in his banking-house at Strasburg. Do you want to meet her again? Pay a compliment to Madame de Restaud, who gives a ball day after to-morrow; the Baronne d'Aldrigger and her daughters will be there, and you'll get an invitation.' For the next three days, in the dim chamber of his brain, Godefroid saw *his* Isaure with white camellias and sweet motions of the head, just as we can see any object that we have gazed at long in a bright light if we shut our eyes; it shines within them in miniature, radiant, glowing, sparkling in the murky darkness."

"Bixiou! you are falling into phenomena; keep to tableaus," cried Couture.

"Well, here's one," said Bixiou, striking, no doubt, the attitude of a café waiter. "Now, attention, gen-

tlemen! Finot, one has to pull upon your mouth as the driver of a *coucou* on that of his steed. Madame Théodora-Marguerite-Wilhelmine Adolphus (of the house of Adolphus & Co., Mannheim), widow of Baron d'Aldrigger, was not a good stout German woman, sturdy and reflective, with a white face, gilded like the froth on a pot of beer, and enriched with all the patriarchal virtues possessed by Germany — speaking novelistically. Her face was still fresh, rosy on the cheek-bones as that of a Nuremberg doll, with lively corkscrew curls upon the forehead, enticing eyes, not the first white hair to be seen, and a slim waist, the charms of which were set in relief by gowns made with bones like a corset. On her forehead and temples were just a few wrinkles, which she would gladly, like Ninon, have banished to her heels, but the wrinkles would persist in tracing their zigzags in more visible places. As an only heiress, spoilt by her parents, spoilt by her husband, spoilt by the city of Strasburg, and perpetually spoilt by her daughters, who adored her, the baroness still allowed herself to wear pink, and short petticoats, and a pretty knot at the point of her corsage, which defined her waist. When a Parisian saw this baroness stepping along the boulevard, he smiled and condemned her, without admitting (as a jury has lately done in a fratricidal case) extenuating circumstances. But the scoffer is always

a superficial being, and, consequently, a cruel one; the rascal never considers the share that belongs to society in the absurdities he laughs at, — for Nature has made people stupid; only it is social life that makes them fools."

"What I think fine in Bixiou," said Blondet, "is that he is thorough; when he does n't scoff at others, he scoffs at himself."

"Blondet, I 'll owe you one for that," said Bixiou, significantly. "Well, as I was saying, if this little baroness was lackadaisical, heedless, selfish, and incapable of forethought, the responsibility for her defects lies upon the house of Adolphus & Co., Mannheim, and on the purblind love of Baron d'Aldriggér. Gentle as a lamb, the baroness had a tender heart, easily moved, but unfortunately the emotion lasted but a short time, and, consequently, was soon superseded. When the baron died, the shepherdess came near following him, so violent and so true was her grief; but the next day, at breakfast, they served her some peas which she liked, and those delicious peas calmed her. She was so blindly loved by her two daughters, and by her servants, that the whole household rejoiced in a circumstance which enabled them to conceal from her sight the sad spectacle of the departure of the body. Isaure and Malvina hid their tears from this adored mother, and occupied her mind in choosing mourning

clothes, while the Requiem was being sung for their father. When a coffin is placed beneath that great black-and-white catafalque, spotted with wax, which serves for the bodies of three thousand well-bred persons before it gets renovated (that's the estimate of an undertaker's assistant, a philosopher whom I once consulted on this point); when a very indifferent sub-priest has bawled out the *Dies iræ*, and the head-priest, not less indifferent, is saying the service, — do you know what the friends dressed in black, standing or seated about the church, say to each other? There, Couture! there's a tableau for you; can't you see them? 'How much do you think old Aldrigger has left?' says Desroches to Taillefer, who, you remember, gave us the finest known orgy just before his death — "

"Desroches? Was Desroches a lawyer in those days?"

"He bought his practice in 1822," said Couture. "A bold thing for the son of a poor clerk who never earned more than eighteen hundred francs a year, and whose mother kept an office for stamped papers. He worked cruelly hard from 1818 to 1822. He entered Derville's office as fourth clerk, and was made second in 1819."

"Desroches!"

"Yes," said Bixiou. "Desroches has sat like us,

as poor as Job, on the dunghills of poverty. Sick of wearing coats too narrow and sleeves too short, he rushed through his apprenticeship in despair, and had just bought a *titre nu*, — a practice but no clients. A lawyer without a penny, without briefs, without friends (except us), he had to pay the interests on the purchase-money, and give bonds."

"He used to make me think then of a tiger got loose from the Jardin des Plantes," said Couture. "Lean, tawny-haired, eyes the color of Spanish tobacco, sour skin, cold, phlegmatic in manner, but harsh to widows, cutting to orphans, a furious worker, the terror of his clerks, who were not allowed to lose their time; able, artful, double-faced, honeyed in speech, never angry, but filled with hatred, — the hatred of the legal fraternity."

"But he has some good in him," cried Finot. "He is devoted to his friends; his first act was to take Godeschal, Mariette's brother, for his head-clerk."

"In Paris," said Blondet, "the race of lawyer has but two shades; there 's the lawyer-honest-man, who lives within the terms of the law, pushes through his cases, does n't run after business, neglects nothing, counsels his clients loyally, makes them compromise on doubtful points, — a Derville, in short. Then there 's the starveling-lawyer, to whom all is fish provided his costs are secured; who would pull down, not moun-

tains (those he sells), but planets; who undertakes to make a scoundrel triumph over an honest man, if by chance the honest man can be legally put in the wrong. Desroches, our friend Desroches, saw his chance at that trade, very poorly practised by the poor devils of his profession; he bought up causes from men who were afraid of losing them; he flung himself into pettifogging as a man might who was resolved to wrench himself out of poverty. He was right; and he did his business honestly. He made himself protectors among public men by straightening their affairs, as he did for our dear des Lupeaulx, whose position was badly compromised. It needed such influence to carry him along, for when Desroches began he was very coldly looked upon by the courts, — he who had such difficulty in rectifying the blunders of his clients. Come, Bixiou, go on! tell us how Desroches came to go to that church."

"'D'Aldrigger left seven or eight hundred thousand francs,' replied Taillefer to Desroches' question. — 'Ah, bah! there is but one person who knows what that fortune really is,' said Werbrust, a friend of the deceased. — 'Who?' — 'That fat knave Nucingen. He 'll go to the cemetery; d'Aldrigger was his patron, and, out of gratitude, he has been helping the goodman to invest.' — 'The widow will feel the difference.' — 'How so?' — 'Why, d'Aldrigger loved his wife. Don't laugh, they are looking at us.' — 'Tiens, there

comes du Tillet; he 's late, gets in for the Epistle.' — 'He 'll marry the eldest girl, no doubt.' — 'Is that likely?' asked Desroches, 'he is more than ever pledged to Madame Roguin.' — 'He! pledged! you don't know him.' — 'What do you know of the position of Nucingen and du Tillet?' asked Desroches. — 'Just this,' said Taillefer. 'Nucingen is a man who has probably made way with the capital of his old patron, and wants to return it to him.' — 'Heu! heu!' exclaimed Werbrust, 'it is devilish damp in these churches, heu! heu!' — 'Return it! how?' — 'This way. Nucingen knows that du Tillet has a great fortune, he wants to marry him to Malvina; but du Tillet distrusts Nucingen. To onlookers, the game is amusing.' — 'Dear me!' said Werbrust, 'is that girl already marriageable? How fast we are going old!' — 'Malvina d'Aldrigger is over twenty, my friend. Old d'Aldrigger was married in 1800. He gave us some fine fêtes in Strasburg, on the occasion of his marriage and the birth of Malvina. That was in 1801 at the Peace of Amiens, and we are now in 1823, papa Werbrust. In those days everything was Ossianized, and the baby was called Malvina. Six years later, under the Empire, chivalry came to the front, and there was a mania for *Partant pour la Syrie* — a lot of stuff! D'Aldrigger then named his second daughter Isaure; she is now seventeen; that makes two girls to marry.' —

'Those three women won't have a penny in ten years,' said Werbrust, confidentially to Desroches. — 'There's d'Aldrigger's valet,' said Taillefer, 'the old fellow who is howling and weeping over there; he saw those girls grow up, and he is capable of anything to provide them a living.' — Priests at the desk: *Dies iræ.* — Choristers: *Dies illæ.* — Taillefer: 'Adieu, Werbrust, that *Dies iræ* makes me think too much of my poor son.' — 'I'm going too; it is too damp here,' said Werbrust. — The beggars at the door: 'A few sous, messieurs, dear messieurs!' — The beadle: 'Pan! pan! *For the needs of the Church.*' — The priests: 'Amen!' — A friend: 'What did he die of?' — An idle joker: 'Aneurism of the heel.' — A passer: 'Who is this personage who has let himself die?' — A relation: 'The President de Montesquieu.' — Beadle to the beggars: 'Come, be off with you; they've given us money on your account; don't ask anything more!'"

"What vim! what spirit!" cried Couture.

In fact, we seemed to hear the whole movement that took place in the church. Bixiou imitated all, even to the shuffling of the feet of the men who went with the body.

"Poets, novelists, writers of all kinds say many fine things about Parisian manners and customs," said Bixiou; "but that's the truth about funerals. Out of

every hundred persons who pay the last duty to some poor devil of a dead man, ninety-nine talk of business and pleasure in the church. To find some poor little real sorrow demands impossible circumstances. In fact, *is* there such a thing as grief without egotism?"

"Heu! heu!" exclaimed Blondet. "There is nothing so little respected as death — perhaps that 's because there 's nothing less respectable."

"It is so common!" remarked Bixiou. "Well," he continued, "Nucingen and du Tillet accompanied the body to the cemetery. The old valet went on foot. The banker's carriage was driven behind that of the clergy. 'Well, my good frent,' said Nucingen to du Tillet as the procession turned into the boulevard, — 'now is a fine time to marry Malvina; you can be the prodector of dat poor weeping family; you 'll get a home already made, and Malvina is certainly a berfect treasure.'"

"Good heavens! I think I hear that old Robert Macaire of a Nucingen talking," said Finot.

"'A charming person,' replied Ferdinand du Tillet, with fire but without the least warmth."

"All du Tillet in ten words!" cried Couture.

"'She may seem ugly to those who don't know her,' went on du Tillet; 'but I own she has soul.' — 'And heart,' replied Nucingen; 'that 's the point of the affair, mine frent; you 'll get devotion and intelligence. In

this devilish business of ours we never can tell who 'll live and who 'll die; it is therefore a great blessing to be able to rely on the heart of a wife. I 'd exchange Delphine, who, you know, brought me over a million, for Malvina, whose *dot* is n't as pig as dat.' — 'How much has she?' — 'I don't know exactly,' said the banker; 'but there 's something.' — 'She has a mother who likes pink!' said du Tillet. That remark put a stop to Nucingen's attempts. After dinner he informed Théodora-Wilhelmine, that there were scarcely more than four hundred thousand francs of her husband's fortune left. The daughter of the Aldophuses of Mannheim reduced to twenty-four thousand francs a year puzzled her brains to understand that condition of things. 'Why!' she said to Malvina, 'I have always had six thousand francs a year for the dressmaker alone. Where *did* your father get the money? With twenty-four thousand a year we shall be poor. Ah! if my father could see me fallen thus he would die of it, if he were n't dead already. Poor Wilhelmine!' and she began to weep. Malvina, not knowing how to console her mother, represented to her that she was young and pretty, and pink became her, and she could go to the Opera and the Bouffons with Madame de Nucingen. She soothed her mother into a dream of fêtes, balls, concerts, beautiful gowns and great successes, — a dream which began

under the curtains of a blue silk bed in an elegant chamber next to that in which Monsieur le Baron d'Aldrigger had expired two days earlier. It is now necessary that I should tell you the history of that gentleman in three words. During his lifetime that respectable Alsacian, a banker in Strasburg, had enriched himself to the tune of three millions. In 1800, then aged thirty-six, and at the apogee of a fortune made during the Revolution, he married, from love and ambition both, the sole heiress of the Adolphuses of Mannheim, a young girl adored by her parents, whose fortune she inherited within ten years. D'Aldrigger was then baronified by H. M. the Emperor and King, for his fortune was doubled. Unluckily, he became possessed by a passion for the great man who had thus ennobled him. So, between 1814 and 1815, he ruined himself by seriously believing in the sun of Austerlitz. The honest Alsacian did not suspend payment, did not buy out the interests of his creditors with stocks and bonds which he knew were valueless; no, he paid in cash from his desk, retired from banking, and deserved the comment of his former head-clerk, Nucingen: 'Honest man, but a fool!' All debts settled, there remained to him five hundred thousand francs and outstanding debts from an Empire which no longer existed. 'That's what it is to believe too much in Napoleon,' he remarked on seeing the results of his

liquidation. When you've been first in a town, how is it possible to stay there when you've gone under? The Strasburg banker did what all ruined provincials do, — he came to Paris, where he courageously wore tricolor braces embroidered with the imperial eagles, and consorted with the Bonapartists. He placed his funds in the hands of the Baron de Nucingen, who gave him eight per cent for all, and bought his imperial claims at a discount of only sixty per cent, which made d'Aldrigger wring Nucingen's hand and say: 'I knew you had the heart of an Alsacian.' Nucingen forced our friend des Lupeaulx, then in the government, to pay those claims in full. Though badly clipped, the Alsacian still had a working revenue of forty-four thousand francs. His regrets, however, soon became complicated by *spleen*, — a disease which fastens on men accustomed to live in the excitement of business when they are forcibly weaned from it. The banker made it his duty to sacrifice himself — the noble heart! — to his wife, whose fortune was lost with his; she had let him take it with the carelessness of a girl who knows nothing of business. Madame d'Aldrigger was therefore supplied with all the luxuries to which she was accustomed; and the void caused by the loss of her social position in Strasburg was covered by the pleasures and enjoyments of Paris. The house of Nucingen then stood, as it still stands, at the head of financial society, and the wily baron made

it a point of honor to treat the honest baron in the best possible manner. The old man's noble virtue brought credit to the salon Nucingen. Every winter dipped deeper into d'Aldrigger's capital; but he dared not reproach the pearl of the Adolphuses; on the contrary, his tenderness was the most simple-hearted and the most unintelligent this world has ever seen. 'Worthy man, but a fool!' He died saying to himself, 'What will become of them without me?' At a moment when he was alone with his old valet, Wirth, the goodman, between two gasps, commended his wife and daughters to his servant's care, as if that Alsacian Caleb were the only reasonable being he had about him. Three years later, in 1826, Isaure was twenty-five years old, and Malvina, the elder, was still unmarried. By dint of going into society, Malvina at last discovered how superficial all social relations are, and how all things are there examined and rated. Like most girls who are said to be 'well-brought-up,' Malvina had begun by being ignorant of the mechanism of life, the importance of wealth, the difficulty of obtaining ready money, and the cost of living. Consequently, during these six years, each item of the knowledge she acquired was a wound to her. The four hundred thousand francs left by the late d'Aldrigger in the hands of the house of Nucingen were placed to the credit of the baroness, and in times of need the

shepherdess drew from that fund as if it were an inexhaustible spring. At the moment when our pigeon, Godefroid, advanced towards his dove, Nucingen, knowing the nature of the baroness, had explained to Malvina the financial situation of her mother: three hundred thousand francs was all that remained in his hands; her income of twenty-four thousand francs was therefore reduced to eighteen thousand. Wirth had managed to keep the household on its old footing for three years. After this revelation of the banker, the horses were given up, the carriage sold, the coachman dismissed by Malvina, without her mother's knowledge. The furniture of the house, about to be renewed after ten years' service, was left as it was; fortunately, it had all faded together; so, to those who love harmony, this was only half an evil. The baroness, a flower hitherto well preserved, now began to resemble a chilled and shrivelled rose left hanging alone on the bushes in November. I who am telling you all this, I saw that opulence diminishing tone after tone and tint by tint! Give you my word, it was horrible! That was my last grief. After that I said to myself, 'What folly to take an interest in others!' While I was a clerk in a government office I was silly enough to care for the people with whom I dined; I defended them if any one abused them, I never slandered them myself, I — oh! I was a babe! Well, when her daughter explained the

situation, the *ci-devant* pearl cried out: 'Oh, my poor children! who 'll make my gowns? I can't have new caps, or receive company, or go into society.' What do you think is the greatest sign of love in a man?" said Bixiou, interrupting himself. "Because, as you see, it was important for the family to know if Beaudenord was really in love with that little blonde."

"He neglects his business," said Couture.

"He wears three shirts a day," said Finot.

"A preliminary question!" said Blondet. "Can, and should, a superior man ever be in love?"

"Friends," said Bixiou, with a sentimental air, "let us beware, as of a venomous reptile, of the man who, feeling himself in love with a woman, snaps his fingers or throws away his cigar, saying: 'Pooh! there are lots of others in the world!' Government sometimes employs that citizen, as we know, at the ministry of Foreign affairs. Blondet, I request you to notice that Godefroid had quitted diplomacy."

"Well, then, say he was absorbed; love is the only chance fools have for making their way," replied Blondet.

"Blondet! Blondet! then why are we all so poor?" cried Bixiou.

"And why is Finot so rich?" replied Blondet. "I'll tell you some day, my son, and you 'll understand it. Just look at Finot filling my glass as if I had carried up his wood! Come, go on, Bixiou."

"You put your finger upon it, the *absorbed* Godefroid made ample acquaintance with the tall Malvina, the volatile baroness, and the little dancer. He fell into servitude, — the most minute and astringent of servitudes. The corpse-like remains of that opulence did not revolt him. Ah! — Bah! he accustomed himself by degrees to the tatters. Never did the old green damask with white trimmings seem to that fellow either shabby, or spotted, or needing to be renewed. The curtains, the tea-table, the Chinese ornaments on the fireplace, the rococco chandelier, the Persian carpet worn threadbare, the piano, the flowered porcelain service, the napkins fringed (and also ragged) after the Spanish fashion, the chintz salon, adjoining the blue bedroom of the baroness, with all its accessories, were to Godefroid holy and sacred. Stupid women whose beauty shines in a manner to leave mind, heart, and soul in shadow can alone inspire such forgetfulness, such absorption; a clever woman never abuses her advantages; it is the silly little women who lay hold of a man. Beaudenord told me himself that he loved that solemn old Wirth; and the old fellow actually felt for his future master the respect which the Catholic believer feels for the Host. That honest Wirth was a German Gaspard, one of those beer-drinkers who mask their shrewdness by good-humor as a cardinal of the middle ages carried his dagger up his sleeve. Wirth, foreseeing a husband

for Isaure, spun around Godefroid the encompassing web of his Alsacian kindliness, — the most adhesive glue of all gummy substances. Madame d'Aldrigger was profoundly *improper;* she thought love the most natural thing in the world. When Isaure and Malvina went to walk together in the Tuileries or the Champs Élysées, where they were likely to meet the young men of their acquaintance, the baroness would say: 'Amuse yourselves, my dear girls!' Their friends, the only persons who could slander the two sisters, defended them; for the extreme freedom of action which everybody enjoyed in the Aldrigger salon made it a unique spot in Paris. People with millions could scarcely have provided such evenings where all things were talked of wittily, where formal dressing was not *de rigueur*, where every one was so much at his ease as to stay to supper without being asked. The two sisters corresponded with whom they pleased, and received their letters beside their mother without the baroness ever dreaming of asking what they were about. This adorable mother gave her daughters all the benefits of her own egotism, — the most amiable affection in the world, in the sense that selfish persons, not liking to be interfered with, interfere with no one, and do not worry the lives of those about them with brambles of advice, thorns of remonstrance, or those wasp-stings which ardent friends who want to know all things and control all things bestow upon us."

"You touch my heart," said Blondet; "but, my good fellow, you are not telling your tale, you are *blaguing*."

"Blondet, if you were not drunk you'd hurt my feelings. Of us four," said Bixiou, appealing to the rest, "he is the only really literary man. It is on his account that I do you the honor of treating you as *gourmets*. I distil my tale, and he criticises me! My friends, the greatest sign of mental sterility is the heaping up of facts. The sublime comedy of the 'Misanthrope' proves that art consists in building a palace on the point of a needle. Do you want me to tell you a tale which shall rush like a cannon-ball, and have no more in it than the report of a commanding general? We were conversing, we were laughing, and this journalist, this half-starved bibliophobe, demands, being drunk, that I should teach my tongue the silly ways of a book" (pretends to weep). "A sorry day for French imagination when they try to dull the needles of its wit! *Dies iræ.* Let us weep for Candide, and shout for the "Critique of Pure Reason," Symbolism, and all the other systems in five compact volumes put forth by Germans, who did n't know that Paris had possessed them, since 1750, in a few witty phrases, — the diamonds of our national intellect. Blondet is driving the hearse of his own suicide, he who gives in his journal the last words of all the great men who die without saying anything."

"There you go!" said Finot.

"I am explaining to you in what consists the happiness of a man who is not a stockholder (no reference to Couture). Well, now don't you see at what a price Godefroid procured for himself the most extensive happiness a young man dreams of? He studied Isaure to be sure of being comprehended! Things which comprehend each other must be counterparts. Now there's nothing so like to each other as nothingness and infinitude; stupidity is nothingness, genius is infinitude. These two lovers wrote each other the stupidest letters in the world, sending back and forth on perfumed paper the consecrated words: 'Angel!' 'Æolian harp! with thee I am completed!' 'There is a heart in my virile breast!' 'Feeble woman! poor me!' — in short all the frippery of modern love. Godefroid remained scarcely ten minutes in any other salon; he talked without pretensions of any kind to women, who consequently thought him very witty. You can judge of his absorption by one fact. Toby, his horses and carriages became mere secondary things in his existence. He was not happy unless buried in a comfortable arm-chair opposite to the baroness, engaged in looking at Isaure, and taking tea while talking with the little circle of friends who nightly assembled between eleven and twelve o'clock in the rue Joubert, where *bouillotte* could be played without

fear. I myself always won when I played there. When Isaure had put out her pretty little foot in its black satin slipper, and Godefroid had gazed at it long, he outstayed the others and said to Isaure: 'Give me that slipper.' Then Isaure lifted her foot, rested it on a chair, took off the slipper and gave it, with a look, such a look! — you understand? Godefroid ended by discovering a great secret in Malvina's life. When du Tillet rapped at the door a bright blush would color Malvina's cheeks, saying plainly, 'Ferdinand!' The eyes of the poor girl as they looked at that two-legged tiger lighted up like a brazier on which a draught of air was suddenly turned; she betrayed extreme delight when Ferdinand took her aside for a private talk near a *console* or a window. How rare and beautiful a thing is a woman loving enough to be naïve and let us read into her heart! Heavens! it is as rare in Paris as the singing flower in the Indies. In spite, however, of this intimacy, begun since the day the Aldriggers first appeared at Madame de Nucingen's, Ferdinand did not marry Malvina. Our savage friend du Tillet did not show himself jealous at the assiduous court which Desroches was paying to Malvina, for the lawyer was feigning love in order to pay off the cost of his practice with a *dot* then estimated at a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Though deeply humiliated by du Tillet's indifference, Malvina loved him too well to

close the door upon him. In that girl who was all soul, sentiment, ardor, pride sometimes yielded to love and sometimes offended love called back her pride. Calm and cold, our Ferdinand accepted her tenderness, inhaled it with the tranquil pleasure of the tiger licking the blood that stains his jaws; he came in search of the proofs of it, and was seldom two days without appearing in the rue Joubert. The rascal then possessed about eighteen hundred thousand francs; the question of fortune could not therefore have been important to him, and yet he had resisted, not only Malvina, but also the two barons, Nucingen and Rastignac, who were forcing him along at the rate of seventy-five leagues a day — but without a thread — through the tortuous labyrinth of their schemes. Godefroid could not refrain from saying a word to his future sister-in-law as to the singular situation she was in between the banker and the lawyer. 'You want to lecture me about Ferdinand and find out the secret between us,' she said, frankly 'Dear Godefroid, say no more. Ferdinand's birth, his antecedents, his fortune, have nothing to do with it; therefore you may believe it is something extraordinary.' However, a few days later, Malvina took Beaudenord aside and said: 'I don't think Monsieur Desroches is an honest man' (oh, that instinct of love!); 'he wants to marry me, and yet he is paying court to the daughter of some bourgeois. I

should like to know if I am a *pis-aller*, and if marriage is to him an affair of money? Find out for me.' In spite of his cleverness Desroches could not fathom du Tillet; he was afraid he meant to marry Malvina. Consequently, the fellow was making himself a safe retreat; his financial position was now intolerable; he was scarcely earning, all costs paid, enough to meet the interest on his debt. Women never understand such situations. To them the heart is always millionnaire."

"But as neither Desroches nor du Tillet have married Malvina," said Finot, "explain Ferdinand's secret to us."

"Secret? well here 't is," replied Bixiou. "Universal rule: a young person who once gives her slipper, though she may have refused it for ten years, is never married by —"

"Nonsense!" said Blondet, interrupting him. "People love because they love. Here 's Ferdinand's secret. Universal rule: don't marry when sergeant, because you may become Duke of Dantzic and marshal of France. Just see what an alliance du Tillet made later! He married one of the daughters of the Comte de Granville, the head of one of the oldest families of the French magistracy."

'Desroches's mother had a friend," continued Bixiou, "the wife of a druggist, the which had retired fat with a fortune. Druggists have very absurd ideas: to give

his daughter a good education, he sent her to a boarding-school! This man, Matifat, expected to marry his daughter on the strength of two hundred thousand francs in good money which did n't smell of drugs."

"Do you mean Florine's Matifat?" asked Blondet.

"Well, yes! Lousteau's, yours, ours, in short! Those Matifats, then lost to us, had come to live in the rue du Cherche-Midi, the quarter farthest from the rue des Lombards, where they had made their fortune. I've studied them, those Matifats! In my young days at the ministerial galleys I was jammed for eight hours out of the twenty-four among a lot of twenty-two-carat ninnies. I have seen originals who convinced me that the flattest surface has projections. Yes, I tell you that one bourgeois is to another what Raffaelle is to Natoire. The widow Desroches had long been manœuvring that marriage for her son, in spite of an obstacle presented in the person of one Cochin, son of Matifat's sleeping partner, a clerk in the ministry of Finance. To the eyes of Monsieur and Madame Matifat the profession of a lawyer appeared, as they said, to offer guarantees for the happiness of a wife. Desroches lent himself to his mother's schemes in order to have something to fall back upon, and conducted himself judiciously towards the Matifats. To make you understand another style of happiness, it becomes necessary to describe to you these two merchants, male

and female, possessing a little garden, living in a fine ground-floor apartment, amusing themselves by looking at a jet of water no thicker than a straw, which rose and fell perpetually from a block of limestone in the middle of a basin about six feet in diameter, getting up early in the morning to see if the flowers had bloomed, with nothing to do, but horribly restless, dressing themselves to pass the time, bored at the theatres, and always on the road between Paris and Luzarches, where they had a country-house, at which I have often dined. One day — Blondet hear this! — they wanted to set me going, and I related to them a tale which lasted from nine in the evening till midnight, — a gambling tale! I had just brought on my twenty-ninth personage when old Matifat, who, as head of the house, held out till then, gave a loud snore, after winking and blinking for about five minutes. The next day they were all very complimentary about the conclusion of my tale. The society of these bourgeois consisted of Monsieur and Madame Cochin, Adolphe Cochin, Madame Desroches, and a little fellow named Popinot, a druggist in active employ, who gave them news of the rue des Lombards — you know him, Finot. Madame Matifat, who loved art, bought lithographs, lithochromos, colored drawings, — anything she could find that was cheap. The Sieur Matifat diverted himself by watching new enterprises, speculating with

small sums, just to warm up a few emotions — Florine had cured him of the ways of the Regency. The daughter of this pair was a girl without manners, and having all the appearance of a lady's maid in a good family; she could play a sonata pretty well, wrote an English hand, knew French and spelling, — in short, a complete bourgeois education. She was very impatient to be married in order to get out of the paternal mansion, which she hated as an officer hates the dog-watch, — for the dog-watch with her lasted all day. Desroches, or Cochin junior, a notary, a gamekeeper, a fictitious English lord for a husband were all one to her. As she evidently knew nothing whatever of life, I pitied her, and tried to reveal to her the great mystery. Bah! the Matifats locked their door to me; the bourgeois and I never can comprehend each other!"

"She afterwards married General Gouraud," remarked Finot.

"In forty-eight hours Godefroid de Beaudenord, ex-diplomatist, had fathomed the Matifats and their schemes," continued Bixiou. "Rastignac happened to be paying a visit to the shepherdess while Godefroid was making his report to Malvina. A few words struck his ear, and he guessed what the subject was, partly from the rather sour satisfaction on Malvina's face. Rastignac stayed on till two in the morning,

and they call that man selfish! Beaudenord departed when the baroness went to bed. 'Dear child,' said Rastignac to Malvina, in a kindly paternal tone, as soon as they were alone, 'remember that a poor fellow heavy with sleep has drunk cup after cup of tea to keep awake till two in the morning in order to say to you solemnly: MARRY. Don't be hard to please; don't consider feelings; don't think about the odious calculations of a man who keeps one foot here and one foot at the Matifats'; don't reflect about anything: *marry!* When a girl marries she puts herself upon a man who takes a pledge to place her in a position, more or less happy, in which her material prosperity is assured. I know the world; young girls, mothers, grandmothers, are all hypocrites in talking sentiment about marriage. None of them care in their hearts for anything but a good position. When a girl is well married the mother feels she has done a good stroke of business.' And Rastignac proceeded to develop his theory of marriage, which, according to him, is a commerical partnership instituted for the support of life. 'I don't ask for your secret,' he said in conclusion, 'I know it. Men tell each other everything, as you women do when you leave us after dinner. Well, here's my last word: marry. If you don't marry, remember that I implored you, here, this evening, to *marry*.' Rastignac spoke in a certain tone which commanded not only attention

but reflection. His insistence was of a nature to surprise his hearer. Malvina was so struck to the very quick of her mind (the spot at which Rastignac had aimed) that she thought about it all night, and was vainly searching on the morrow for the cause of that advice."

"I don't see in all these yarns you are spinning anything that even remotely resembles the origin of Rastignac's fortune, about which you are pledged to enlighten us," cried Couture, impatiently.

"I've just got there!" retorted Bixiou. "You have now followed the course of all the little rivulets which made that forty thousand francs a year we are all so jealous of. Rastignac now held in his hand the threads of those existences —"

"What! Desroches, the Matifats, Beaudenord, the Aldriggers, d'Aiglemont?"

"Yes, and a hundred others," replied Bixiou.

"Tell us how?" cried Finot. "I know many things, but I can't see the answer to that enigma."

"Blondet told you in bulk about Nucingen's first two liquidations; now here's the third, in detail," returned Bixiou. "At the peace of 1815, Nucingen comprehended what we are just beginning to comprehend to-day: namely, that money is only a power when it is in disproportionate quantity. He was secretly envious of the Rothschilds. He possessed five millions,

but he wanted ten. With ten millions he knew he could make thirty; with five he could only make fifteen. He therefore resolved on a third liquidation. This great man then devised to pay his creditors with fictitious securities, and keep their money. A conception of this nature does not present itself on 'Change in quite so mathematical a form. Liquidation as thus practised consists in giving a patty for a gold-piece to a lot of big children who, like the little children of other days, prefer the patty to the coin, not being aware that with the coin they could buy a hundred or more patties."

"What stuff you talk, Bixiou," cried Couture. "Why, nothing is more loyal than that. There 's never a week, now-a-days, that patties are not offered to the public for gold. But the public is not forced to give its money; has n't it the right to inform itself?"

"You 'd rather it were forced to be a stockholder," said Blondet, laughing.

"No," said Finot, "for where would shrewdness be then?"

"Well done for Finot!" cried Blondet.

"Who gave him that clever speech?" asked Couture.

"Well," continued Bixiou, "Nucingen had twice had the happiness of giving (without intending to do so) patties which turned out to be worth more than he had pocketed. That unfortunate happiness filled him with

remorse. Such joys have ended by killing a man. He had now waited ten years for an occasion to make no such blunder, and to create securities which should only seem of great value — "

"But," said Couture, "if banking is to be explained in that way, you make business impossible. More than one honest banker has, with the approval of an honest government, persuaded the shrewdest speculators to take securities which must, in a given time, depreciate. More than that: have n't you frequently seen issued — always with the approval and support of governments — securities to pay the interest on certain funds in order to keep them floating, and then get rid of them? Those operations have all more or less analogy with Nucingen's liquidations."

"In small matters," said Blondet, "the method may seem questionable, in great ones it is the highest financiering. There are, as we know, arbitrary acts which are criminal when done by individuals to individuals, but which are nothing at all when spread through a multitude, — just as a drop of prussic acid is harmless in a bucket of water. Kill a man, and they 'll guillotine you; but kill five hundred men for a governmental necessity of any kind, and the political crime is respected. If you take five thousand francs from my desk, you go to the galleys. But, with the condiment of a profit to make, cleverly put into the mouths of a

thousand speculators, you can force them to take the bonds of I don't know what insolvent republic or monarchy, issued, as Couture said, to pay the interest of the same bonds: who can complain of that? These are true principles of the age of gold in which we live."

"Well, to return," said Bixiou. "The mere putting on the stage of so vast a scheme required a good many Polichinellos. In the first place. The firm of Nucingen had knowingly and designedly invested its five millions in an American venture the profits of which could not accrue until too late. It denuded itself intentionally; all liquidation must say it has a cause. The house had possession of private funds and outstanding securities to the amount of about six millions. Among the private funds were the three hundred thousand of the Baronne d'Aldrigger, Beaudenord's four hundred thousand, one million belonging to d'Aiglemont, three hundred thousand to Matifat, half-a-million to Charles Grandet, the husband of Mademoiselle d'Aubrion, etc. By creating an industrial enterprise as a stock company, with the shares of which he could buy out his creditors by manœuvres more or less able, Nucingen might have laid himself open to suspicion. He was far too wary for that; he caused the enterprise to be created by another man, — an enterprise destined to play the part of the Mississippi in Law's scheme. A peculiar characteristic of Nucingen

is to make the ablest men of business serve his projects without ever communicating those projects to them. Nucingen let drop before du Tillet the glorious and pyramidal idea of combining in an enterprise as shareholders, and constituting a capital strong enough to pay large dividends to the stockholders in the first instance. Tried for the first time at a moment when the capital of ninnies abounded, this combination was likely to produce a rise in the value of the stock, and consequently a profit to the banker who put them on the market. Remember that this was in 1826. Though struck with the idea, as fruitful as it was ingenious, du Tillet thought, very naturally, that if the enterprise did not succeed the blame would fall somewhere. Accordingly he suggested putting forward a visible director of this commercial machine. You all know the secret of the founding of the firm of Claparon by du Tillet, — one of his finest inventions!"

"Yes," said Blondet, "the responsible editor in finance, the tout, and the scape-goat. But in these days we do things better: we put up a notice, 'Address the administration of, etc., etc., such a street, such a number,' and there the public will find clerks in green caps, as jaunty as sheriff-officers."

"Nucingen backed the firm of Charles Claparon & Co. with all his credit. A million of the Claparon paper might have been put on several markets fear-

lessly. Du Tillet now proposed to put Claparon forward in this affair. Agreed. In 1825 the stockholder was not spoiled in the matter of industrial enterprises. "Margins" were still unknown. Managers did not bind themselves not to sell stock beyond the value of the assets; they were not forced to make deposits in the Bank; they guaranteed nothing. They did not find it necessary to explain their limited joint-stock company while assuring the shareholder they were doing him a kindness by not asking him more than a thousand, or five hundred or even two hundred and fifty francs a share. They did n't make known the fact that experience *in œre publico* never lasted but seven years, five years, two years, and thus a crash would not be long in coming. You see, all this was during the infancy of the art. Even the publicity of those tremendous advertisements had not been called into play to stimulate imaginations by asking money of all the world."

"We only came to that when people refused to subscribe," remarked Couture.

"Moreover, competition in such enterprises did not then exist," continued Bixiou. "The manufacturers of *papier mâché* and of printed cottons, the workers in zinc, the theatres, the newspapers, did n't then rush at the hapless speculator like hounds at the death. Fine stock projects, as Couture calls them, strengthened by the reports of experts, — those princes of

science, — were modestly put forth in the silence and shade of the Bourse. The money-lynxes performed, financially speaking, the calming air in the 'Barbiere.' They advanced *piano*, *piano*, putting forth slight *cancans*, whispered from ear to ear about the excellence of the project. They never worked upon the sufferer, namely, the stockholder, except in his own home or at the Bourse, by cleverly creating rumors which ran up shares to the four figures."

"Well, though we are all alone, and can say what we like, I stick to my opinion," said Couture.

"You are always a goldsmith, Monsieur Josse," said Finot.

"Finot is nothing if not classic, constitutional, and a fogey," said Blondet.

"Yes, I am a goldsmith," added Couture (on whose account Cérizet had just been condemned in the correctional police court). "I maintain that the new method is infinitely less treacherous, more honorable, less murderous than the old custom. Publicity allows reflection, examination. If some fellow gets swallowed up, he went into the thing with his eyes open; nobody sold him a pig in a poke. Trade —"

"Heavens! here comes trade!" ejaculated Blondet.

"Trade is the gainer," continued Couture, paying no attention to the interruption. "All government which meddles with commerce and does not leave it free un-

dertakes a costly folly. It *must* come either to the *maximum* or to monopoly. In my opinion, nothing is more comformable with the great principle of the liberty of commerce than associations of shareholders. If you interfere with them, you make yourself responsible for capital and profits, which is a stupid thing to do. In all business, profits are in proportion to risks. What does it matter to the state in what way the rotatory motion of money is obtained, provided it is kept in perpetual activity? What matter is it who is rich and who is poor, if there is always the same quantity of taxable riches? Besides, it is more than twenty years since shareholding societies and limited joint-stock companies have existed in England, — the most commercial country in the world, where all things are debated, where Parliament hatches a thousand or twelve hundred laws in a session, and where not one single member of either House ever rose to speak against the method of — "

"Curing full coffers by vegetable treatment, — namely, *carrots*," said Bixiou.

"Now see here!" said Couture, getting excited. "You have ten thousand francs; you take ten shares of a thousand francs each in ten different enterprises. You are robbed nine times (that does n't really happen; the public is stronger than the robbers; but I 'm supposing it), and your tenth investment is successful — "

"Pure luck!"

"Very likely."

"It was n't meant to succeed."

"Oh! go on; *blague* if you choose! — Well, the punter who is wise enough to divide his stakes in that way meets with a splendid investment, like the men who took stock in the mines of Wortschin. Messieurs, let us admit between ourselves that the men who grumble are hypocrites in despair at having had neither a true conception of the venture, nor the power to proclaim it, nor the cleverness to speculate upon it. What a head it needs to start a project in these days when the greed of the shareholder is equal to that of the originator! What a great magnetizer the man must be who creates a Claparon, — who invents expedients! Don't you see the moral of all this? Our times will be no better than ourselves. We live in an age of greed, in which no one cares for the real value of a thing provided he can make a profit by passing it over to his neighbor; and that thing is passed to the neighbor because the greed of the stockholder who wants a profit is equal to that of the originator of the enterprise who proposed it to him."

"Is n't he fine, that Couture?" said Bixiou to Blondet, "he is going to propose that we should raise a statue to him as a benefactor of humanity."

"We 'll get him to declare that the money of fools

is, by divine right, the patrimony of clever men," said Blondet.

"Messieurs," continued Couture, "we can laugh here in private to make up for the grave faces we pull elsewhere as we listen to the solemn nonsense which consecrates laws that are made in a hurry."

"He 's right," said Blondet. "What sort of times are these when the moment a spark of intellect flashes up, it is put out at once by the application of a special law? Legislators, nearly all of them coming from some petty *arrondissement* where they have studied society in newspapers, shut up the fire in the engine. When the boiler explodes, then comes weeping and gnashing of teeth! These are days when no laws except fiscal and penal laws are made! Do you want me to give you the great key-note of what is now taking place? *There is no longer any religion in the government of the state.*"

"Ah!" said Bixiou, "bravo, Blondet! you have laid your finger on the sore of France. The exaggerated claims of the public treasury have deprived our land of more conquest than the curse of war. In the ministry of finance, where I did seven years of the galleys as a clerk, yoked with the bourgeois, there was another employé, a man of talent, who set himself to reform the whole system of finances. Ha! we ousted him finely! France would have been too prosperous if he 'd had

his way; she'd have set to work to reconquer Europe; we acted for the repose of the nations. I killed that Rabourdin with a caricature!" [See Bureaucracy.]

"When I use the word *religion*, I don't mean homilies or cant, I apply the word in its high political sense," continued Blondet.

"Then explain what you mean," said Finot.

"This explains it," replied Blondet. "Much has been said about Lyons, and the Republic cannonaded in the streets; but no one has told the truth. The Republic seized upon the riot as a rioter lays hold of a gun. I'll tell you the truth of that history; it is droll, and also profound. The commerce of Lyons is a commerce without soul; for it does not manufacture a single yard of silk that is not ordered and payment thereof guaranteed. When orders stop, the workmen starve; they earn only just enough to keep body and soul together while working; galley-slaves are better off than they. After the revolution of July, poverty in Lyons reached such a point that the *canuts* [name for the silk-weavers of Lyons] ran up the flag of 'Bread or Death,' — one of those manifestoes which the government ought to have studied. It was produced by the dearness of provisions in Lyons. Now Lyons wants to build theatres and public buildings, and become a capital; hence enormous custom-duties. The republicans saw their opportunity in this riot for

bread; they organized the *canuts*, who thus fought for two causes. Lyons had its three days' riot; then order was restored, and the *canut* went back to his hovel. But the *canut*, honest and upright until then, always returning in the fabric all the silk that was weighed to him in bales, now turned honesty out-of-doors, reflecting that the merchants were making a victim of him, and *oiled his fingers.* He returned weight for weight to be sure, but — he sold the silk which oil had represented in the balance; and since then the commerce of French silks has been infested with greasy stuffs which might have led to the ruin of the town and one important branch of French business. The manufacturers and the government, instead of suppressing the cause of the evil, have, like certain physicians, driven in the disease by violent topical remedies. They ought to have sent an able man to Lyons, one of those men who are called unprincipled, — an Abbé Terray, for instance; instead of that they saw only the military side. Consequently, these troubles made *gros de Naples* forty sous a yard. Those silks are still sold, and therefore the manufacturers have invented, no doubt, some means of getting rid of the grease. This system of manufacturing from hand to mouth without foresight was natural in a region where Richard Lenoir, one of the greatest citizens France has ever had, ruined himself by keeping six thousand men at work when he had no

orders, and found the ministry stupid enough to let him succumb to the revolution which 1814 brought about in the price of manufactured tissues. That 's the only case of a merchant deserving a statue. Well, that man is to-day the object of a subscription without subscribers; whereas they 've just given a million to the children of Genera' Foy! Lyons is consistent; she knows France, and knows it is devoid of religious feeling. The history of Richard Lenoir is one of those blunders which Fouché held to be greater than a crime."

"If, in the way such schemes are presented," said Couture, harking back to the point at which he had been interrupted, "there should be a taint of charlatanism (a word now become blasting, and perched astride of the dividing wall between the just and the unjust), I take leave to ask where charlatanism begins and where it ends; in short, what is charlatanism? Do me the kindness to say who there is that is *not* a charlatan? Come, a little good faith — the rarest of all social ingredients! Without it commerce, which consists in searching at night for something to sell in the morning, would be nonsense. A seller of matches has the instinct of monopolizing. Grabbing and accumulating salable things is the one thought of the shopkeeper in the rue Saint-Denis *called* virtuous, as it is that of the speculator *called* shameless. When the shops are full, it is necessary to sell. In order to sell, you must stir

up customers; hence the signs of the middle ages and the prospectuses of to-day. Between calling to a customer, and forcing him to enter and trade, I can't see a hair's difference. It may happen, it must happen, it often happens, that merchants get hold of damaged goods, for the vendor is perpetually cheating the buyer. Well, consult the most honorable merchants and dealers in Paris; they'll all relate to you, triumphantly, the cheatery they have invented to get rid of damaged merchandise which somebody else has got off upon them. The famous house of Minard began by sales of that nature. The rue Saint-Denis sells you a gown of greasy silk; that's all it can do. The most upright of dealers will utter, with a perfectly innocent air, the most unprincipled of all sentiments: *We must get out of a bad business as best we can.* Blondet has shown you the affairs of Lyons, with their causes and consequences; I am going to apply my theory with an anecdote. A workman in woollens, an ambitious fellow, saddled with children by a wife he loves too much, believes in the republic. He buys red wool, and makes those knitted caps you may have noticed on the heads of the *gamins de Paris;* I'll tell you how they come there. The republic is vanquished. After Saint-Merri, the caps were unsalable. When a workman finds himself with a wife, ten children, and ten thousand red woollen caps which nobody wants,

as many ideas come into his head as into that of a banker crammed with ten thousand shares of an enterprise he distrusts and wants to get rid of. Do you know what that workman, that suburban Law, that Nucingen of knitted caps, bethinks himself of doing? He goes to a café dandy, one of those wags who drive the police crazy at the rural balls beyond the Barriers, and he asks him to play the part of an American captain, buying goods for the American market, and lodging at the Hôtel Meurice, and to go to a certain large hatter and look at a scarlet woollen cap the man had, and then express a general *desire* for a large consignment. The hatter, scenting an American trade, rushes to the workman and secures the whole lot. You understand of course? — lots of caps, but no American captain. Now to attack commercial liberty, because of such little drawbacks, would be to attack justice under pretence of there being crimes she does not punish, or to accuse society of being ill-organized because of the evils which society begets. From caps and the rue Saint-Denis to shares and the Bank, draw your own conclusions!"

"A crown for Couture!" cried Blondet, twisting up his napkin and putting it on the speaker's head. "I go farther still, gentlemen. If our present theories are vicious, whose fault is it? That of law, — of law judged by its whole system; of legislation; of those

great men of the *arrondissements* which the provinces send here stuffed full of moral ideas, — ideas indispensable to the conduct of life unless one fights the law, but stupid when they hinder a man from rising to the height at which the legislator ought to maintain himself. Laws may restrict passions from this or that development, — play, lottery, the Ninons of the street, or what you please; but they can never extirpate the passions. Kill those, and you kill society, which, if it does n't beget them, at least develops them. Thus you shackle by restrictions the love for play which is latent in every heart, — in that of a young girl, a provincial, a diplomat (for the whole world wants a fortune gratis), — and the spirit of gambling instantly breaks out in other spheres. You stupidly suppress lotteries, and cooks don't rob their masters any the less, they simply put their pilferings in the savings-bank, and the stake for them is two hundred francs instead of forty sous, — for shares in banks, industrial projects, joint-stock companies, have become a lottery, gambling without the green cloth, but with an invisible rake and a calculated drawn game. Gambling hells are closed, lotteries done away with, and here's France far more moral, cry the imbeciles, as if the *punter* were suppressed. People still gamble; only the profits no longer go to the state, which supplants a tax that was paid with pleasure by an irritating tax; and this without diminishing suicides, —

for the new gambler does not kill himself, only his victim. I am not talking of capital in foreign lands, now lost to France, nor of the Frankfort lotteries, against the peddling of which the Convention decreed the penalty of death, and to which the *procureur-syndics* devoted themselves! Here 's the real gist of the philanthropic silliness of our legislators: The encouragement given to savings-banks is a gross political folly. Suppose an uneasiness arises about the management of the affairs of the state; the government has created a *queue* waiting for money as the *queue* waiting for bread was created by the revolution. So many savings-banks, so many chances for riot. Three *gamins* at the corner of a street unfurling a single flag could start a revolution. But that danger, great as it may be, seems to me less to be feared than the demoralization of the people. A savings-bank is the inoculation of the vices begotten by self-interest in persons whom neither education nor reason will keep steady to their combination, tacitly criminal. Such are the effects of philanthropy. A great public man ought to be in the abstract a scoundrel, or else communities are ill-managed. An honest public man is a steam-engine with feelings, or a pilot who makes love, while he holds the tiller — the vessel sinks. A prime minister who takes a hundred millions and makes France great and glorious, is preferable to a minister

buried at the expense of the state who has wrecked his country. Between Richelieu, Mazarin, and Potemkin, all three possessed in their different epochs of three hundred million, and the virtuous Robert Lindet, unable to make successful use of the *assignats*, or of the National domain, or of the idiots who were the real cause of the overthrow of Louis XVI., would you hesitate? Come, get on, Bixiou."

"I shall not explain to you," said Bixiou, "the nature of the enterprise invented by the financial genius of Nucingen; it would be all the more improper to do so because it is still going on; its shares are quoted at the Bourse; the scheme was so well-planned, the object of the enterprise seemed so long-lived, that the stock, put on the market at a nominal thousand francs, went down to three hundred, then up to seven hundred, and finally reached par after surviving the storms of the years '27, '3 , '32. The financial crisis of 1827 made them shaky, the revolution of July brought them down; but the scheme has some real vigor in it — Nucingen could n't invent an absolutely bad affair. The nominal capital was ten millions; the real capital seven, three millions of which belonged to the founders and to bankers charged with the business of putting the stock on the market. Everything was calculated and arranged to make the shares appear to earn two hundred francs during the first six months by declaring a false dividend.

Hence an apparent twenty per cent on ten millions. Du Tillet's interest in the enterprise amounted to five hundred thousand francs. In the vocabulary of finance this cake is called 'a mouthful to gobble'! Nucingen proposed to himself to create with his millions made of a few quires of pink paper by the aid of a lithographic stone, a budget of pretty little shares to dispose of, carefully put away in his desk. The *real* shares were to float the enterprise, buy a handsome building, and commence operations. Nucingen also provided himself with other shares in I don't know what mines of argentiferous lead, and sea-coal, and in two canals; presentation shares, granted for launching those four enterprises into full activity, — all being well-officered and winning favor by means of dividends taken out of their capital. Nucingen could count on a premium if the shares went up; but the baron neglected them intentionally; he left them visibly drifting on the surface of the market, — to attract the fish! Thus, you see, he had massed his securities as Napoleon massed his troopers, in order to liquidate during the crisis which was beginning to loom up, — the sort of crisis which in 1826–7 revolutionized the European markets. If he had had his Prince of Wagram, he might have said, as Napoleon did on the heights of Santon: 'Watch the market. On such a day, at such an hour, funds will make a move.' But

to whom could he confide his project? Du Tillet had no suspicion of his involuntary connivance. The two first liquidations had proved to our powerful baron the necessity of binding to himself some man who would serve him as a piston to act upon the creditors. Nucingen had no nephew; and he dared not make a confidant. He wanted a devoted man, an intelligent Claparon, of good manners, a true diplomatist, a man worthy of being a minister, and worthy of himself, Nucingen. Such connections are not formed in a day, nor in a year. Rastignac had been by this time so completely coiled about by the baron that, like the Prince of the Peace who was loved equally by the King and the Queen of Spain, he thought he possessed in Nucingen a valuable dupe. After having laughed for years at a man whose real capacity was long unknown to him, Rastignac ended by giving a grave and serious devotion to Nucingen, recognizing in him a strength which he had hitherto believed he alone possessed. At the time of his first entrance into society Rastignac was led to despise it utterly. From 1820 he thought, like Nucingen, that there were none but *apparently* honest men; he regarded the world as a collection of all corruptions and all rascalities. If he admitted exceptions, he only the more condemned the masses. He believed in no virtue, only in circumstances under which a man might be virtuous. This conviction

was the work of a moment; it came to him on the summit of Père-Lachaise, the day when he buried there a poor old man, the father of his Delphine, dying the dupe of our society, the dupe of the truest sentiments, abandoned and left to die alone by his daughters and his sons-in-law. On that day Rastignac resolved to fool that world, and to march through it in full panoply of virtue, honor, and fine manners. Egotism armed him from head to foot. When that fellow discovered that Nucingen was provided with the same armor, he esteemed him, as in some tourney of the middle ages a knight armed *cap-à-pie*, and mounted on a barb, would have esteemed an adversary horsed and caparisoned like himself. He grew somewhat enervated during his earlier day by the delights of Capua. The friendship of a woman like the Baronne de Nucingen is of a nature to make a man abjure egotism. After allowing herself to be deceived once in her affections by a piece of mechanism like the late de Marsay, Delphine must have felt, for a young man full of the religions of the provinces, a real attachment. Her tenderness reacted on Rastignac. When Nucingen had put upon his wife's friend the harness that every manipulator puts upon the man he intends to use as a tool (which came to pass at the very moment when he was meditating his third liquidation), he confided his position to that man, and showed him, as an obligation

of friendship, the rôle of adjutant which he must take and play. The baron thought it dangerous to initiate his conjugal collaborator into his actual plan. Rastignac believed in some probable catastrophe, and Nucingen let him think that he was saving the ship. But when a skein has so many threads, knots will come. Rastignac trembled for Delphine's fortune; he stipulated for the independence of the baroness, and demanded on her account a separation of property, — vowing to himself that he would thus square his own account with her, by tripling her means. As Eugène said nothing about himself, Nucingen begged him to accept, in case of complete success, twenty-five shares, of a thousand francs each, in the argentiferous lead-mines, which Rastignac took, so as not to affront him! Nucingen had made his revelations to Rastignac the evening before the day on which Eugène so strenuously urged Malvina to marry. The sight of a hundred prosperous persons then coming and going about Paris, tranquil as to their future, such as Godefroid de Beaudenord, the Aldriggers, d'Aiglemont, etc., made Rastignac shudder, like a young general who contemplates an army before he leads it for the first time into battle. Poor little Isaure and Godefroid playing at love! — were they not another Acis and another Galatea beneath the rock that this fat Polyphemus was about to hurl down upon them?"

"That scamp of a Bixiou!" cried Blondet, "he almost has talent."

"Ha! so I 'm not spinning it out too fine, now!" said Bixiou, enjoying his success and looking at his interested auditors. "For two months past," he continued, after this interruption, "Godefroid had indulged himself in all the little happinesses of a man who is soon to be married. At such times men are like birds making their nests in the springtime, coming and going, picking up bits of straw, flying with them in their beaks, and padding the domicile of their eggs. Isaure's future husband had hired a little house in the rue de la Planche for fifteen hundred francs a year, convenient, comfortable, and neither too large nor too small. He went there every morning to watch the workmen and superintend the decorations. He had introduced *comfort* — the only good thing there is in England — in the shape of a calorifère which maintained an equable heat all over the house. The furniture was well chosen, neither too brilliant, nor too elegant, the colors cool and soft to the eye; internal shades and external blinds were at all the windows; the plate and the carriages were new. Beaudenord had rearranged the stable, the harness-room, and the coachhouse, where Paddy Joby Toby bustled about, frisking like a marmot escaped from its cage, and delighted to hear there would be women in the house, and especially a

lady. The passion of the man who sets up housekeeping, who chooses clocks, and rushes to his love with his pockets full of patterns of stuffs, and consults her about the furniture of the bedroom; who comes and goes and trots — when he does come and go and trot — inspired by love, is one of those things which rejoice an honest heart, especially that of an upholsterer. Now as nothing pleases all the world more than the marriage of a handsome young man of twenty-five with a charming young woman of twenty who dances well, Godefroid, puzzled about making the *corbeille*, invited Rastignac and Madame de Nucingen to breakfast, in order to consult them on that all-important matter. He had the sensible idea of also inviting his cousin d'Aiglemont and his wife and Madame de Sérizy. Fashionable women are fond of these little dissipations now and then with bachelors; they like to breakfast with them."

"Playing truant," remarked Blondet.

"After breakfast they were to go to the rue de la Planche and see the little house of the future couple," continued Bixiou. "Women are like ogres after raw flesh on such occasions; they refresh their present lives with that young joy not dimmed as yet by enjoyment. The table was spread in the little salon, which, in honor of the burial of a bachelor's life, was tricked out like the horses of a procession. The breakfast

was selected in a way to offer those tempting morsels which women love to eat and munch and suck in the morning, a period of the day when their appetites are fearful — though they won't admit it, thinking that they compromise themselves by saying, 'I'm hungry.' 'Why have you come alone?' said Godefroid, when Rastignac appeared. — 'Madame de Nucingen is out of spirits; I'll tell you all about it,' replied Rastignac, who seemed by his manner to be worried. — 'A quarrel?" cried Godefroid. — 'No,' replied Rastignac, 'I'll tell you later.' At four o'clock the ladies had driven away to the Bois, and Rastignac remained behind, looking gloomily from the window on Joby Toby Paddy, who was boldly standing before the tall horse harnessed to the tilbury, with his arms crossed like the great Napoleon; being unable to reach up and take hold of the horse's bridle he kept him in subjection by his shrill little voice, and the horse feared Joby Toby. 'Now tell me, my dear friend, what the matter is,' said Godefroid to Rastignac. 'You are gloomy, anxious, and your gayety is forced. Does your half-happiness try your soul? I know it is sad not to be married at the mayor's office and in church to the woman we love.' — 'Have you the courage, Beaudenord, to hear what I have to tell you; and will you understand how attached I must be to you to commit the indiscretion of which I now make myself guilty?' said Rastignac, in

that peculiar tone which resembles the snap of a whip. 'What is it?' asked Godefroid, turning pale. — 'I was sad at your joy just now; I have not the heart, seeing all those preparations, that budding happiness, to keep from you a fatal secret.' — 'Tell it to me quickly.' — 'Swear to me that you'll be silent as the grave about it.' — 'I swear.' — 'And if some friend of yours is interested in the secret you will not tell it to him?' — 'I will not.' — 'Well, then, Nucingen started last night for Brussels; he must go into bankruptcy unless he can liquidate. Delphine has petitioned the civil courts this morning for the separation of her property. You can still save your fortune.' — 'How?' asked Godefroid, feeling his blood turning to ice in his veins. — 'Simply write a letter to the Baron de Nucingen and date it fifteen days ago, giving him an order to invest all your funds in some stock-company, such, for instance, as the Claparon association. You have fifteen days, a month, three months possibly, in which to sell them above their present price, and they are sure to rise.' — 'But d'Aiglemont. He has a million with Nucingen.' — 'Listen to me; I don't know if Nucingen has enough stock to cover that amount; besides, I am not d'Aiglemont's friend; I can't betray Nucingen's secrets to him as I have done to you. If you say a word you must answer to me for the consequences.' — Godefroid remained perfectly silent and motionless for

ten minutes. — 'Do you accept? Yes, or no?' said Rastignac, pitilessly. Godefroid took pen and ink, and wrote and signed the letter which Rastignac dictated. 'My poor cousin!' he ejaculated. — 'Every man for himself,' said Rastignac, adding, to himself as he left the room, 'and one man trapped!' While Rastignac was thus manœuvring about Paris, here is the scene presented by the Bourse. I have a friend from the provinces, a stupid fool, who asked me one day as we passed the Bourse between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, why all those chattering people were collected there, what they could have to say to each other, and why they should be hanging about after the irrevocable settlement for the day of the price of the public securities had taken place. 'My friend,' I said to him, 'they have eaten and they now dig st; during digestion they spread rumors about th ir neighbors, without which there's no commercial security in Paris. They are starting new schemes; and there are some men, Palma for example, whose authority over that crowd is like that of Arago at the Royal Academy of Sciences. He says the speculation is to be made, and the speculation is made!'"

"Ha!" cried Blondet, "what a man that Jew is! a Jew with, not a university, but a universal education. In him universality does not preclude depth; what he knows, he knows to its foundation; his genius

for business is intuitive; he is the grand referendary of all the lynxes who control the market in Paris; they never commit themselves to an enterprise till Palma has examined it. He is grave, he listens, he studies, he reflects, and says to his questioner, who, seeing his attention, believes he is won, 'It won't do.' What I think most extraordinary is that, although he has been Werbrust's partner for ten years, not the slightest cloud has ever arisen between them."

"That can be said only of very strong or very weak natures," said Couture. "All between those two extremes quarrel and part enemies."

"You must understand," said Bixiou, "that Nucingen had, with great judgment and a most adroit hand, cast his little shell beneath the columns of the Bourse, where it burst, as intended, about four o'clock. 'Have you heard some serious news?' said du Tillet to Werbrust, drawing him aside. 'Nucingen is in Brussels; his wife presented a petition in court this morning for separation of property.' — 'Are you an accomplice in the liquidation?' asked Werbrust, smiling. — 'Come, come, no nonsense, Werbrust,' said du Tillet; 'you know men who have his paper; listen to me; you and I could do a stroke of business here. The shares of our new company are earning twenty per cent; they 'll earn twenty-five by the end of the quarter, — you know why; they are issuing a magnificent dividend.' — 'Ha,

slyboots!' said Werbrust, 'go your ways; you're a devil with long sharp claws, but you are sticking them into butter now.' — 'But just let me tell you, or we sha'n't have time to work it round. The idea came into my head when I heard the news, and I positively did see Madame de Nucingen in tears; she's frightened about her fortune.' — 'Poor thing!' said Werbrust, ironically. 'Well?' he added interrogatively. — 'Well,' continued du Tillet, 'I have in my hands a thousand shares of a thousand francs each which Nucingen gave me to dispose of — you understand?' — 'Yes.' — 'Let us buy up a million of the Nucingen paper at ten, twenty, twenty-five per cent discount, and we shall get a fine premium on that million; we shall be debtors and creditors both, and the mixture will work well! But we shall have to act cautiously, or the holders might think we were working the matter round in Nucingen's interest.' — Werbrust understood the trick at once and shook du Tillet's hand with the look of a woman who cheats her friend. 'Well, have you heard the news?' said Martin Falleix, coming up to them; 'the house of Nucingen suspends.' — 'Look here!' said Werbrust; 'don't spread that about. Let those who hold his paper make the best bargain they can for themselves.' — 'Do you know the cause of the disaster?' asked Claparon, joining them. — '*You* know nothing about it,' replied du Tillet. 'There won't be the slightest disaster;

the liabilities will be paid in full. Nucingen will begin again, and all the funds he wants he can have from me. I know the cause of this suspension. He put his capital into Mexican investments which return him metals, gold, church bells, sacramental silver, all the relics of Spanish monarchy in America. The arrival of these returns has been delayed; the good baron is embarrassed, that's all.' — 'Yes, that's all,' said Werbrust. 'I'll take his paper at twenty per cent discount.' The news thereupon circulated with the rapidity of fire in a pile of straw. The most contradictory things were told. But there was such confidence in the house of Nucingen, owing to the outcome of the two preceding liquidations, that everybody kept its paper. 'Palma must lend us a helping hand,' said Werbrust. Palma was the oracle of the Kellers, who were stuffed full of the Nucingen paper. One word of alarm said by him would suffice. Werbrust induced him to sound the tocsin."

"Just what I told you," said Blondet. "That Jew controls all Paris."

"The next day," continued Bixiou, "fear reigned at the Bourse. The Kellers, advised by Palma, sold the Nucingen paper at ten per cent discount, and gave the cue on 'change; for they were known to be very shrewd. Taillefer on that parted with three hundred thousand at twenty per cent loss, Martin Falleix two hundred

thousand at fifteen. Gigonnet now guessed the game. He worked up the panic in order to buy Nucingen paper and make two or three per cent by selling it to Werbrust. He met, in a corner of the Bourse, poor Matifat, who had three hundred thousand francs with Nucingen. The retired druggist, pale and haggard, could not see the terrible Gigonnet, the money-lender of his old quarter, coming toward him as if to saw him in two, without trembling. 'Things are going badly; there 's a crisis impending; Nucingen liquidates! But that won't matter to you, père Matifat, you are out of business.' — 'You are wrong there, Gigonnet; I 'm in for three hundred thousand francs, with which I meant to operate in Spanish consols.' — 'Then you 've saved them,' replied Gigonnet. 'Those Spanish securities are worth nothing, whereas I 'll give you something for your account with Nucingen, say fifty per cent.' — 'I 'd rather wait for the liquidation,' replied Matifat; 'no banker has ever paid less than fifty per cent in settlement. Ah! if it were only a matter of ten per cent loss,' sighed the druggist. — 'Well, will you say fifteen?" said Gigonnet. — 'You seem in rather a hurry,' said Matifat. — 'Good-evening to you!' responded Gigonnet. — 'You may have them at twelve.' — 'So be it,' said the usurer. Two millions were bought in that evening by du Tillet and balanced by Nucingen's stock on account of these three chance

associates who obtained their premium on the following day. The poor, pretty old shepherdess, the Baronne d'Aldrigger was breakfasting with her two daughters and Godefroid when Rastignac arrived, with a diplomatic air to have a talk on the financial crisis. The Baron de Nucingen had a warm affection for the Aldrigger family; he had arranged, in case of any misfortune, to cover the baroness's account by the very best securities in his hands, namely, stock in some argentiferous lead mines; but, for her greater security, she ought to send him a letter asking him to thus employ her funds. 'Poor, dear Nucingen! what has happened to him?' asked the baroness. — 'He is in Belgium; his wife petitions for a separation of property; but he has gone to seek help from the Belgian bankers.' — 'Good heavens! how that reminds me of my poor husband! Dear Monsieur de Rastignac, this must distress you very much — you so attached to that family.' — 'Provided all those involved are secured, Nucingen's friends will gain some profit later; he'll pull through this affair, for he is a very able man.' — 'And a very honest one,' added the baroness. By the end of the month, the liquidation of the Nucingen debts was accomplished, without other proceedings than the letters by which each person having an account with the firm requested the investment of his or her money in certain specified securities, and with-

out other formalities on the part of the banking-houses than the exchange of the Nucingen paper for the stocks preferred. While du Tillet, Werbrust, Claparon, Gigonnet, and a few others, who thought themselves clever, bought Nucingen's paper in foreign markets for one per cent premium (for they still made a profit on exchanging it for rising stocks), the stir in the Paris market was all the greater because no one now had anything to fear; Nucingen was talked over, examined, judged, and calumniated: what luxury! what mad enterprises! when a man conducts himself in that way he must expect to be ruined, etc. But all of a sudden, in the midst of this general chorus, a few persons were very much amazed to receive letters from Geneva, Bâle, Milan, Naples, Genoa, Marseilles, London, in which their correspondents announced, without apparent surprise, that they were getting one per cent premium on paper of the house of Nucingen, the notification of whose failure their Paris correspondents had sent to them. 'Something is going on,' said the lynxes. The courts had decreed the separation of property between Nucingen and his wife. Presently the matter grew still more complicated. The newspapers announced the return of the Baron de Nucingen, who had gone to Belgium to consult with a celebrated engineer about working certain coal-mines, then lying idle in the forest of

Bossut. The baron reappeared at the Bourse, without even taking the trouble to deny the calumnies circulated about his house; he disdained to defend himself through the newspapers, and he bought a fine domain for which he paid two millions near the gates of Paris. Six weeks later, the newspapers of Bordeaux announced the arrival in the roadstead of two vessels laden with metals consigned to the house of Nucingen, and valued at seven millions. Palma, Werbrust, and du Tillet understood that the trick was played; but they were the only ones who comprehended it. These men, learned in such matters, studied the getting up of this dramatic affair, this financial jugglery; they saw it had been planned and prepared through many months, and they voted Nucingen to be the greatest of European financiers. Rastignac never really understood the affair, but he pocketed four hundred thousand francs which Nucingen had let him shear from Parisian sheep, with which he dowered and married his sisters. D'Aiglemont, warned by his cousin Beaudenord, came to Rastignac and implored him to accept ten per cent of his million if he enabled him to invest that million in shares of a canal — which is not yet made, for Nucingen has so deceived the government in that affair that the grantees of the canal have an interest in not finishing it. Charles Grandet entreated Rastignac, on the ground of his intimacy with the Nucingens to get his

money in the firm exchanged for stocks. In short, Rastignac played for ten days the rôle of Law, implored by pretty duchesses to give them shares in his Mississippi schemes, and to-day that fellow has forty thousand francs a year, the origin of which lies in those shares of an argentiferous lead mine. Now you know the secret of Rastignac's fortune."

"But," said Finot, "if everybody won, who lost?"

"Conclusion," resumed Bixiou. "Allured by the the pseudo-dividend which they received a few months after the exchange of their money for stocks, the Marquis d'Aiglemont and Beaudenord held on to those securities (I tell you of those two only, who may stand for all the rest). They had three per cent more for their capital, and they sang the praises of Nucingen and defended him wherever he was attacked. On the occasion of Beaudenord's marriage the Nucingens gave a ball the magnificence of which surpassed all expectations. Delphine presented the bride with a charming set of rubies. Isaure danced, not as a young girl, but as a happy wife. The little baroness was more of an Alpine shepherdess than ever. Malvina, the type of *Avez-vous vu dans Barcelone?* listened to du Tillet, in the course of a quadrille, advising her harshly to be Madame Desroches. Desroches himself, egged on by Nucingen and Rastignac, made advances; but, at the first words said to him about shares in the lead-mines constituting the dowry, he

broke off the negotiation and returned to the Matifats. There the lawyer found those cursed canal shares, which Gigonnet had palmed off upon Matifat for his money. Behold Desroches encountering Nucingen's rake on both the *dots* he had aimed for! The final catastrophe was not long in coming. The Claparon company did too heavy a business, it became involved, congested; it passed its dividend, although its operations were thought excellent. This mishap coincided with political turmoils. In 1829 Claparon became known as the man of straw between two colossi and he rolled from his pedestal to earth. From twelve hundred and fifty francs, the stock toppled down to four hundred, although it was worth intrinsically six hundred. Nucingen, who knew its real value, then bought it back. Madame d'Aldrigger had already sold her mining shares, which brought her nothing, and Godefroid sold those of his wife for the same reason. Like the baroness, Beaudenord had exchanged his mining stocks for shares in the Claparon company. Their debts forced them both to sell at the lowest point. Out of what had once been to them seven hundred thousand francs they saved but two hundred and thirty thousand. With that they paid their debts and invested the remnant in the three per cents at 75. Godefroid, that once happy bachelor without a care in the world, who had only to take life easily, found himself burdened

with a wife as stupid as an owl, incapable of bearing trouble, who in six months had changed from a beloved object to a frivolous being; burdened also with a penniless mother-in-law who still dreams of dress. The two families live together to exist at all. Godefroid was forced to look about him for influence to obtain even a place as clerk in the ministry of Foreign affairs on a salary of fifteen hundred francs. His friends, where were they? Travelling. His relations? Surprised, distressed, full of promises: "Oh, yes, my dear fellow, count on me! Poor lad!" — and forgotten in ten minutes! Beaudenord owed the place finally to Nucingen and Vandenesse. These poor people, so worthy and so unfortunate, are living to-day on a fourth-floor lodging in the rue du Mont-Thabor. The granddaughter-pearl of the Adolphuses, Malvina, possesses not one penny; she gives music-lessons so as not to be a burden on her brother-in-law. Dark, tall, thin, and withered, she resembles a mummy escaped from Passalacqua and wandering on foot about Paris. In 1833 Beaudenord lost his situation, and his wife gave him a fourth child. Eight masters and two servants (Wirth and his wife)! money: eight thousand francs a year! The mines are now paying such large dividends that what was once a share of a thousand francs now pays that sum in interest. Rastignac and Madame de Nucingen bought the shares sold by Godefroid and the

baroness. Nucingen was created peer of France after the revolution of July, and grand officer of the Legion of honor. Though he has not liquidated again, they say his fortune now amounts to eighteen millions. Relying on the July ordinances, he sold all his funds and boldly bought Three per cents when they were down to 45. This he made the château believe was pure devotion. It was about that time, in concert with du Tillet, that he swallowed up the three millions of that great scoundrel Philippe Bridau. Lately, as he was passing through the rue de Rivoli on his way to the Bois, the baron caught sight under the arcades of the Baronne d'Aldrigger. The little old creature had a green bonnet lined with pink, a flowered gown, and a mantilla; in short, she was more of an Alpine shepherdess than ever, for she understood the causes of her poverty no better than the causes of her former opulence. She was leaning on the arm of poor Malvina, that model of heroic devotion, who might have been taken for the old mother, while the baroness had the air of a young girl. Wirth was following them with an umbrella. 'There go some people,' said Nucingen to Monsieur Cointet, the minister of Finance, with whom he was driving, 'whose fortune I found it impossible to make. The gust of "principles" being now over, could n't you replace that poor Beaudenord in your office?' Godefroid accordingly returned to

the ministry of Finance, thanks to Nucingen, whom the Aldriggers one and all laud and magnify as a hero of friendship; and he never fails to invite the little shepherdess and her daughters to his balls. It is impossible for any one on this earth to show how that man has, three times and without breaking the law, robbed the public enriched by him and in spite of him. No one can reproach him. Whoever would venture to say that the highest banking is often cutthroat would be held guilty of shameful calumny. If stocks rise and fall, if the value of securities increases or diminishes, such flux and reflux is produced by a mutual atmospheric movement analogous to that of the tides and the moon; and the great Arago should be called upon to give a scientific theory on this important phenomenon. One monetary truth is deducible from all this, which I have never yet seen written."

"What is that?"

"The debtor is stronger than the creditor."

"For my part," said Blondet, "I see in what we have just said and heard the paraphrase of a saying of Montesquieu, in which he concentrated his 'Spirit of the Laws.'"

"Repeat it," said Finot.

"'The laws are spiders' webs, through which the big flies pass while the little flies are caught.'"

"What 's the remedy? what do you want?" asked Finot.

"An absolute government; the only one under which the enterprises of intelligence against law can be repressed! Yes, arbitrary power protects the peoples by coming to the support of the law, for the right of pardon has no reverse; the king who could pardon a fraudulent bankrupt would return nothing to the ruined victim. *Legality* is killing modern society."

"Make the electors comprehend that if you can!" said Bixiou.

"There's some one else charged with that duty."

"Who?"

"TIME. As the Bishop o Léon said, 'Liberty is ancient, but monarchy is eternal· all nations sane of mind will return to it, under one form or another'"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Finot, hearing us leave our dining-room, "there was somebody near us!"

"There's always somebody near us," responded Bixiou, who may have been slightly tipsy.

ANOTHER STUDY OF WOMAN.

ANOTHER STUDY OF WOMAN.

TO LÉON GOZLAN,

As a Testimony to Good Literary Brotherhood.

THE SALON OF MADEMOISELLE DES TOUCHES.

In Parisian society you will nearly always find two distinct evenings in the balls and routs. First, the official evening, at which all the invited guests are present, — a gay world bored. Each person poses for his or her neighbor. The majority of the young women have come there to meet one person only. When each is satisfied that she is the handsomest woman present for that person, and that his opinion is probably shared by some others, she is ready to leave, after the exchange of a few insignificant speeches, such as: "Shall you go early to La Crampade?" — "Madame de Portenduère sang very well, I think." —

"Who is that little woman over there, covered with diamonds?" Or, perhaps, after casting about a few epigrams, which give momentary pleasure and lasting wounds, the groups begin to thin, mere acquaintances take leave, and then the mistress of the house stops her personal friends, and a few artists and lively fellows, saying, in a whisper: "Don't go, we shall have supper presently."

Then the company gathers in a little salon. The second, the real evening, begins, — an evening like those of the old régime, when everybody understands what is talked about, conversation is general, and each person present is expected to show his or her wit and to contribute to the general amusement. The scene has changed; frank laughter succeeds to the stiff artificial air which dulls in society the prettiest faces. In short, pleasure begins as the rout ends. The rout, that cold review of luxury, the march-past of self-loves in full costume, is one of those English inventions which tend to turn all other nations into mere machines. England seems desirous that all the world should be as much and as often bored as herself. This second party succeeding the first is therefore in some French houses a lively protest of the former spirits of our joyous land. But, unfortunately, few houses thus protest; and the reason is plain: if suppers are no longer in vogue it is because at no time,

under any régime, were there ever so few persons in France with settled positions, surroundings, fortunes, families, and name as under the reign of Louis Philippe, in which the Revolution was begun again legally. All the world is on the march toward some end, or it is trotting after wealth. Time has become the most costly of all provisions; no one can allow himself the monstrous prodigality of coming home late and sleeping late the next morning. The second party is therefore only found among women rich enough to really entertain; and since July, 1830, such women may be counted on the fingers.

In spite of the mute opposition of the faubourg Saint-Germain, two or three women, among them the Marquise d'Espard and Mademoiselle des Touches, refused to renounce the influence they had held up to that time over Paris, and did not close their salons.

The salon of Mademoiselle des Touches, which was very celebrated in Paris, was the last asylum of the true French wit of other days, with its hidden profundity, its thousand casuistries, and its exquisite politeness. There you might observe the grace of manner which underlay the conventions of politeness; the easy flow of conversation in spite of the natural reserve of well-bred persons; and above all, generosity and largeness of ideas. There, no one dreamed of reserving his thought for a drama; no one saw a

book to be made out of a narrative. In short, the hideous skeleton of literature in want did not rise and show itself apropos of some piquant sally or some interesting topic.

During the evening of which we shall now speak, chance had collected in the salon of Mademoiselle des Touches a number of persons whose undeniable merits had won for them European reputations. This is not a flattery addressed to France, for several foreigners were among us. The men who chiefly shone were by no means the most distinguished. Ingenious repartees, shrewd observations, capital satires, descriptions given with brilliant clearness, sparkled and flowed without preparation, lavished themselves without reserve as without assumption, and were delightfully felt and delicately enjoyed. The men of the world were particularly noticeable for a grace, a warmth of fancy that was wholly artistic. You will meet elsewhere in Europe elegant manners, cordiality, good-fellowship and knowledge, but in Paris only, in this salon and those I have just mentioned, will be found in perfection that particular form of mind which gives to these social qualities an agreeable and varied harmony, a fluvial motion by which this wealth of thoughts, of formulas, of narratives, of history itself, winds easily along.

Paris, the capital of taste, alone knows the science

which changes conversation to a joust in which the quality of each mind is condensed into a flash, where each tilter says his word and casts his experience into it, where all are amused, refreshed, and have their faculties exercised. There alone you can exchange ideas; there you do not carry, like the dolphin in the fable, a monkey on your back; there you are understood, and you run no risk of staking your gold against false coin or copper. There, in short, talk, light and deep, floats, undulates, and turns, changing aspect and color at every sentence; there, too, secrets are well betrayed. Lively criticism and pithy narrative lead each other on. Eyes are listening as well as ears; gestures put questions to which faces reply. There, all is, in a word, thought and wit. Never had the oral phenomenon, which, if well studied and well-managed, makes the power of the orator and the narrator, so completely bewitched me.

I was not the only one sensitive to these influences, and we passed a delightful evening. The conversation finally turned to narrative, and led, in its rapid course, to curious confidences, striking portraits, and a multitude of fancies, which render that delightful improvisation altogether untransferable to paper. But, by leaving to a few things their tartness, their abrupt naturalness, their sophistical sinuosities, perhaps you will understand the charm of a true French

soirée, taken at the moment when the pleasantest familiarity has made every one forget his or her self-interests, self-loves, or, if you prefer so to call them, pretensions.

About two in the morning, when supper was over, none but a few intimates, all tried friends, tried by an intercourse of fifteen years, and certain men of the world, well-bred and gifted with taste, remained around the table. A tone of absolute equality reigned among them; and yet there was no one present who did not feel proud of being himself.

Mademoiselle des Touches always obliged her guests to remain at table until they took their leave, having many times remarked the total change that takes place in the minds of those present by removal to another room. Between a dining-room and a salon, the charm snaps. According to Sterne, the ideas of an author are different after he has shaved from what they were before. If Sterne is right, we may boldly aver that the inclinations of persons still seated round a dinner-table are not those of the same persons when returned to the salon. The atmosphere is more heady, the eye is no longer enlivened by the brilliant disorder of the dessert; we have lost the benefits of that softening of the spirit, that kindliness and good-will which pervaded our being in the pleasant condition of those who have well eaten, and are sitting at their ease on

chairs as comfortable as they make them in these days. Perhaps we talk more willingly in presence of the dessert and in company with choice wines, during the delightful moments when we rest our elbow on the table and lean our head on our hand. Certain it is that people not only like to talk at such times, but they like to listen. Digestion, nearly always attentive, is, according to characters, either talkative or silent. Each person present then follows his bent.

This preamble was needed to introduce you to the charms of a confidential narrative in which a celebrated man, since dead, depicted the innocent jesuitism of a woman with the crafty shrewdness of a man who has seen many things, — a quality which makes public men the most delightful narrators when, like Talleyrand and Metternich, they deign to tell a tale.

De Marsay, who had now been prime minister for more than six months, had already given proofs of superior capacity. Though friends who had long known him were not surprised to see him display both the talents and aptitudes of a statesman, they were still asking themselves whether he felt within himself a great political strength, or whether he had simply developed in the heat of circumstances. This question had just been put to him, with an evidently philosophical intention, by a man of intellect and observation whom he had made a prefect, — a man

who was long a journalist, and who admired the prime minister without mingling his admiration with that touch of sour criticism by which, in Paris, one superior man excuses himself for admiring another.

"Has there been in your earlier life any fact, thought, or desire, which made you foresee your vocation?" asked Émile Blondet; "for we all have, like Newton, our particular apple which falls, and takes us to the sphere in which our faculties can develop."

"Yes," replied de Marsay, "and I 'll tell you about it."

Pretty women, political dandies, artists, old men, de Marsay's intimates, settled themselves comfortably, each in his own way, and looked at the prime minister. Is it necessary to say that the servants had left the dining-room, that the doors were closed and the portières drawn? The silence which now fell was so deep that the murmur of the coachmen's voices and the stamping of the horses impatient for their stable came up from the courtyard.

"A statesman, my friends, exists through one quality only," said the minister, playing with his pearl-handled and gold dessert-knife. "To know how at all moments to be master of himself; to be able, on all occasions, to meet the failure of events, however unexpected and fortuitous it may be; in short, to have, in his inner self, a cold, detached being, which

looks on as a spectator at all the movements of our life, our passions, our sentiments, and which inspires us, apropos of all things, with the decision of a species of ready-reckoner."

"You are explaining to us why statesmen are so rare in France," said old Lord Dudley.

"From a sentimental point of view it is certainly horrible," said the minister, "and therefore when this phenomenon appears in a young man (Richelieu, warned of Concini's danger by a letter over-night, slept till mid-day, when he knew his benefactor would be killed at ten o'clock), that young man, be he Pitt, or Napoleon if you like, is a monstrosity. I became that monster very early in life, thanks to a woman."

"I thought," said Madame de Montcornet (Virginie Blondet), smiling, "that we unmade more statesmen than we make."

"The monster of whom I speak is only a monster inasmuch as he resists your sex," said the narrator, with an ironical bow.

"If this tale relates to a love-affair," said the Baronne de Nucingen, "I request that it may not be interrupted by reflections."

"Reflection being so contrary to love," remarked Joseph Bridau.

"I was nineteen years of age," resumed de Marsay;

"the Restoration was becoming re-established; my oldest friends know how impetuous and fiery I then was. I was in love for the first time, and I may, at this late day, be allowed to say that I was one of the handsomest young men in Paris. I had youth and beauty, two advantages due to chance, of which we are as proud as if we had won them. I say nothing about the rest. Like all young men, I was in love with a woman about six years older than myself. Only one of you," he said, looking round the table, "will guess her name or recognize her. Ronquerolles was the only one in those days who fathomed my secret, and he kept it carefully. I might fear *his* smile, but he seems to be gone," said the minister, again looking about him.

"He would not stay to supper," said his sister, Madame de Sérizy.

"For six months possessed by this love, but incapable of suspecting that it mastered me," continued the minister, "I gave myself up to that adorable worship which is the triumph and the fragile happiness of youth. I treasured *her* glove, I drank infusions of the flowers *she* had worn, I rose from my bed to go and stand beneath *her* windows. All my blood rushed to my heart as I breathed the perfume that *she* preferred. I was then a thousand leagues from suspecting that women are furnaces above and marble below."

"Oh, spare us those horrible sentiments," said Madame de Camps, laughing.

"I would then have blasted with contempt the philosopher who published to the world that terrible opinion, so profoundly true," replied de Marsay. "You are all too wise and witty to need me to say more on that point; but perhaps the rest that I have to tell may recall to you your own follies. Well, — a great lady, if ever there was one, a widow without children (oh! she had every advantage), my idol went so far as to shut herself up to mark my handkerchiefs with her own hair; in short, she responded to my follies with follies of her own. How is it possible not to believe in a passion when it is guaranteed by folly? We had put, each of us, all our wits into concealing so complete and glorious a love from the eyes of the world; and we succeeded. Of her, I shall tell you nothing; perfect in those days, she was considered until quite recently one of the handsomest women in Paris; at the time of which I speak men would have risked death to obtain her favor. She was left in a satisfactory condition as to fortune, for a woman who loved and was beloved; but the Restoration, to which she was indebted for higher honors, made her wealth insufficient to meet the requirements of her name and rank. As for me, I had the self-conceit that conceives no suspicions. Although my natural jealousy had in

those days a hundred-and-twenty-Othello power, that terrible sentiment slumbered in my breast like gold in its nugget. I would have made my valet flog me had I felt the baseness to doubt the purity and fidelity of that angel, so frail, so strong, so fair, so naïve, so pure, so candid, whose blue eyes let me penetrate with adorable submission to the bottom of her heart. Never the least hesitation in pose, or look, or word; always white and fresh and tender to her beloved as the eastern lily of the Song of Songs. Ah, my friends!" cried the minister, sorrowfully, becoming for the moment a young man, "We must knock our heads very hard against the marble to dispel that poesy."

This cry of nature, which found its echo among the guests, piqued their curiosity, already so cleverly excited.

"Every morning, mounted on that splendid Sultan you sent me from England," he said to Lord Dudley, "I rode past her *calèche* and read my orders for the day in her bouquet, prepared in case we were unable to exchange a few words. Though we saw each other nearly every evening in society, and she wrote to me every day, we had invented, in order to deceive the world and baffle observation, a system of behavior. Not to look at each other, to avoid ever being together, to speak slightingly of each other's

qualities, all those well-worn manœuvres were of little value compared with our device of a mutual false devotion to an indifferent person, and an air of indifference to the true idol. If two lovers will play that game they can always dupe society, but they must be very sure of each other. Her substitute was a man high in court favour, cold, devout, whom she did not receive in her own house. Our comedy was only played for the profit of fools in salons. The question of marriage had not been mooted between us; six years' difference in our ages might cause her to reflect. She knew nothing of the amount of my fortune, which, on principle, I have always concealed. As for me, charmed by her mind, her manners, the extent of her information and her knowledge of the world, I would fain have married her without reflection. And yet her reserve pleased me. Had she been the first to speak to me of marriage, I might have found something vulgar in that accomplished soul. Six full and perfect months! a diamond of the purest water! That was my allowance of love in this low world. One morning, being attacked by one of those bone-fevers which begin a severe cold, I wrote her a note putting off the happiness of a meeting for another day. No sooner was the letter gone than I regretted it. 'She certainly will not believe that I am ill,' I said to myself; for she was fond of seeming jealous and sus-

picious. When jealousy is real," said de Marsay, interrupting himself, "it is the evident sign of a single-minded love."

"Why?" asked the Princesse de Cadignan, eagerly.

"A true and single-minded love," said de Marsay, "produces a sort of bodily apathy in harmony with the contemplation into which the person falls. The mind then complicates all things; it works upon itself, it sets up fantasies in place of realities, which only torture it; but this jealousy is as fascinating as it is embarrassing."

A foreign minister smiled, recognizing by the light of memory the truth of this remark.

"Besides, I said to myself, why lose a happy day?" continued de Marsay, resuming his narrative. "Was n't it better to go, ill as I was? for, if she thought me ill I believed her capable of coming to see me and so compromising herself. I made an effort; I wrote a second letter, and as my confidential man was not on hand, I took it myself. The river lay between us; I had all Paris to cross; when I came within suitable distance of her house I called a porter and told him to deliver the letter immediately; then the fine idea came into my head of driving past the house in a hackney-coach to see if the letter was delivered promptly. Just as I passed in front of it, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the great gate opened to admit the

carriage of — whom do you suppose? The substitute! It is fifteen years since that happened; well! as I tell you of it, this exhausted orator, this minister dried to the core by contact with public business, still feels the boiling of something in his heart and a fire in his diaphragm. At the end of an hour I passed again, — the carriage was still in the courtyard; my note had doubtless not been taken up to her. At last, at half-past three o'clock, the carriage drove away and I was able to study the face of my rival. He was grave, he did not smile; but he was certainly in love, and no doubt some plan was in the wind. At the appointed hour I kept my tryst; the queen of my soul was calm and serene. Here, I must tell you that I have always thought Othello not only stupid, but guilty of very bad taste. No man but one who was half a negro would have behaved as he did. Shakespeare felt that when he called his play the Moor of Venice. The mere sight of the beloved woman has something so healing to the heart, that it dissipates all vexations, doubts, sorrows; my wrath subsided and I smiled again. This at my present age, would have been horribly dissimulating, but then it was simply the result of my youth and love. My jealousy thus buried, I had power to observe. I was visibly ill; the horrible doubts which had tortured me increased the appearance of illness, and she showed me the most

tender solicitude. I found occasion however to slip in the words: 'Had you any visitor this morning?' explaining that I had wondered how she would amuse herself after receiving my first note.

"'I?' she said, 'how could I think of any amusement after hearing of your illness? Until your second note came I was planning how to go to you.'

"'Then you were quite alone?'

"'Quite,' she answered, looking at me with so perfect an expression of innocence that it rivalled that which drove the Moor to kill his Desdemona. As she alone occupied her house, that word was a shocking falsehood. A single lie destroys that absolute confidence which, for certain souls, is the basis itself of love. To express to you what went on within me at that moment, it is necessary to admit that we have an inner being of which the visible man is the scabbard, and that that being, brilliant as light itself, is delicate as a vapor. Well, that glorious inward *I* was thenceforth and forever clothed in crape. Yes, I felt a cold and fleshless hand placing upon me the shroud of experience, imposing upon my soul the eternal mourning which follows a first betrayal. Lowering my eyes not to let her see my dazed condition, a proud thought came into my mind which restored to me some strength: 'If she deceives you she is unworthy of you.' I excused the flush in my face, and

a few tears that came into my eyes, on the ground of increased illness, and the gentle creature insisted on taking me home in her carriage. On the way she was tenderness itself; her solicitude would have deceived the same Moor of Venice whom I take for my point of comparison. In fact, if that big child had hesitated two seconds longer he would, as any intelligent spectator divines, have asked pardon of Desdemona. Therefore, to kill a woman is the act of a child. She wept as she left me at my own door, so unhappy was she at not being able to nurse me herself! She wished she were my valet, she was jealous of his cares! All this was written to me the next day as a happy Clarissa might have written it. There is always the soul of a monkey in the sweetest and most angelic of women!"

At these words the women present lowered their eyes as if wounded by a cruel truth so cruelly stated.

"I tell you nothing of the night, nor of the week that I passed," continued de Marsay; "but it was then that I saw myself a statesman."

Those words were so finely uttered that, one and all, we made a gesture of admiration.

"While reflecting, with an infernal spirit, on all the forms of cruel vengeance to which we can subject a woman," continued de Marsay, — "and there were many and irreparable ones in this case, — I suddenly

despised myself; I felt that I was commonplace, and I formulated, insensibly, a dreadful code, that of Indulgence. To take revenge upon a woman, does not such an act admit that there is but one woman in the world for us, and that we cannot live without her? If so, is vengeance a means to recover her? But if she is not indispensable to us, if there are others for us, why not allow her the same right to change that we arrogate to ourselves? This, you must fully understand, applies only to passion; otherwise it would be anti-social; nothing proves the necessity of indissoluble marriage more than the instability of passion. The two sexes need to be chained together like the wild beasts that they are, in laws as mute and unchangeable as fate. Suppress revenge, and betrayal becomes nothing in love, its teeth are drawn. Those who think that there exists but one woman in the world for them, *they* may take to vengeance, and then there is but one form for it, — that of Othello. Mine was different; it was this: — "

The last three words produced among us that imperceptible movement which journalists describe in parliamentary debates as "profound sensation."

"Cured of my cold and of pure, absolute, divinest love, I let myself go into an adventure with another heroine, who was charming, of a style of beauty exactly opposite to that of my deceiving angel. I took

good care, however, not to break with that very clever creature and good comedian, for I don't know whether a true love itself can give more graceful enjoyments than accomplished treachery. Such hypocrisy equals virtue. I don't say this for you Englishmen," added the minister, gently, addressing Lady Barimore, daughter of Lord Dudley. "Well, I even tried to fall in love. It happened that I wanted for this new angel a little gift done with my own hair, and I went to a certain artist in hair, much in vogue in those days, who lived in the rue Boucher. This man had a monopoly of capillary gifts, and I give his address for the benefit of those who have n't much hair of their own; he keeps locks of all kinds and all colors. After receiving my order, he showed me his work. I then saw productions of patience surpassing those of fairy tales and even of convicts; and he put me up to all the caprices and fashions which reigned in the regions of hair.

"'For the last year,' he said to me, 'there has been a rage for marking linen with hair; happily, I had a fine collection on hand and excellent workwomen.'

"Hearing those words, a suspicion assailed me; I drew out my handkerchief and said to him: —

"'Probably this was done at your place, with false hair?'

"He looked attentively at the handkerchief and said: —

"'That lady was very difficult to suit; she insisted on matching the very shade of her hair. My wife marked those handkerchiefs herself. You have there, monsieur, one of the finest things of the kind ever executed.'

"Before this last flash of light I might still have believed in something; I could still have given some attention to a woman's word. I left that shop having faith in pleasure, but, in the matter of love, as much of an atheist as a mathematician. Two months later I was seated beside my ethereal deceiver on a sofa in her boudoir. I was holding one of her hands, which were very beautiful, and together we were climbing the Alps of sentiment, gathering flowers by the way, plucking the leaves from the daisies (there is always a moment in life when we pluck out the daisy leaves, though it may be in a salon where daisies are not). At the moment of deepest tenderness, when we seem to love most, love is so conscious of its want of duration that one feels an invincible need to ask: 'Dost thou love me?' — 'Wilt thou love me always?' I seized that elegiac moment, so warm, so flowery, so expansive, to make her tell her finest lies, with the ravishing exaggerations of that Gascon poesy peculiar to love. Charlotte then displayed the choicest flowers

of her deception: she could not live without me; I was the only man in all the world to her; yet she feared to weary me, for in my presence her mind forsook her; near me her faculties became all love; she was too loving not to have many fears; of late she had sought a means to attach me forever to her side; but God alone could do that."

The women who were listening to de Marsay seemed offended by his mimicry; for he accompanied these words with pantomime, poses of the head, and affectations of manner, which conveyed the scene.

"At the moment when I was expected to believe these adorable falsehoods, I said to her, still holding her right hand in mine: —

"'When do you marry the duke?'

"The thrust was so direct, my glance met hers so straight, that the quiver of her hand lying softly in mine, slight as it was, could not be completely dissembled; her eyes fell before mine, and a slight flush came into her cheeks.

"'The duke!' she said, feigning the utmost astonishment. 'What can you mean?'

"'I know all,' I replied; 'in my opinion you had better not delay the marriage. He is rich, he is a duke; but also, he is religious, — more than that, he is a bigot! You don't seem aware how urgent it is that you should make him commit himself in his own eyes

and before God; if you don't do this soon you will never attain your end.'

"'Is this a dream?' she said, pushing up her hair from her forehead with Malibran's celebrated gesture, fifteen years before Malibran ever made it.

"'Come, don't play the babe unborn, my angel,' I said, trying to take both her hands. But she crossed them in front of her with an angry and prudish little air. 'Marry him, I am willing,' I continued. 'In fact, I strongly advise it.'

"'But,' she said, falling at my feet, 'there 's some horrible mistake here; I love no man but you in this world; you can ask me for any proof you like.'

"'Rise, my dear,' I said, 'and do me the honor to be frank.'

"'Yes, before Heaven.'

"'Do you doubt my love?'

"'No.'

"'My fidelity?'

"'No.'

"'Well, then, I have committed the greatest of crimes,' I went on. 'I have doubted your love and your fidelity; and I have looked at the matter calmly —'

"'Calmly!' she cried, sighing. 'Enough, Henri, I see that you no longer love me.'

"You observe that she was quick to seize that way

of escape. In such scenes an adverb is often very dangerous. But luckily curiosity induced her to add: —

"'What have you seen or heard? Have I ever spoken to the duke except in society? Have you ever noticed in my eyes — '

"'No,' I said, 'but I have in his. You have made me go eight times to Saint-Thomas d'Aquin to see you both hearing mass together.'

"'Ah!' she cried, 'at last I have made you jealous!'

"'I wish I could be,' I replied, admiring the suppleness of that quick mind, and the acrobatic feats by which she strove to blind me. 'But, by dint of going to church, I have become an unbeliever. The day of my first cold and your first deception you received the duke when you thought me safe in bed, and you told me you had seen no man.'

"'Do you know that your conduct is infamous?'

"'How so? I think your marriage with the duke an excellent affair; he gives you a fine name, the only position that is really suitable for you, n honorable and brilliant future. You will be one of the queens of Paris. I should do you a great wrong if I placed any obstacles in the way of this arrangement, this honorable life, this superb alliance. Ah! some day, Charlotte, you will do me justice by discovering how

different my character is from that of other young men. You are on the point of being forced to break with me, and yet you would have found it very difficult to do so. The duke is watching you; his virtue is very stern, and it is high time that you and I should part. You will have to be a prude, I warn you of that. The duke is a vain man, and he wants to be proud of his wife.'

"'Ah!' she said, bursting into tears, 'Henri, if you had only spoken!' (you see she was determined to put the blame on me) — 'yes, if you had wished it we could have lived all our lives together, married, happy before the world, or in some quiet corner of it.'

"'Well, it is too late now,' I said, kissing her hands and assuming the airs of a victim.

"'But I can undo it all,' she said.

"'No, you have gone too far with the duke. I shall even make a journey, to separate us from each other more completely. We should each have to fear the love of our own hearts.'

"'Do you think, Henri, that the duke has any suspicions?'

"'I think not,' I replied, 'but he is watching you. Make yourself *dévote*, attend to your religious duties, for the duke is seeking proofs; he is hesitating, and you ought to make him come to a decision.'

"She rose, took two turns about the boudoir in a

state of agitation either feigned or real; then she found a pose and a glance which she no doubt felt to be in harmony with the situation; for she stopped before me, held out her hand, and said in a voice of emotion: —

"'Henri, you are a loyal, noble, charming man, and I shall never forget you.'

"This was excellent strategy. She was enchanting in this transition, which was necessary to the situation in which she wanted to stand towards me. I assumed the attitude and manners of a man so distressed that she took me by the hand and led me, almost cast me, though gently, on the sofa, saying, after a moment's silence: 'I am deeply grieved, my friend. You love me truly?'

"'Oh, yes.'

"'Then what will become of you?'"

Here all the women present exchanged glances.

"I have suffered once more in thus recalling her treachery, but at any rate I still laugh at the air of conviction and soft inward satisfaction which she felt, if not at my death, at least at my eternal unhappiness," continued de Marsay. "Oh! you need n't laugh yet," he said to the guests; "the best is still to come. I looked at her very tenderly after a pause, and said: —

"'Yes, that is what I have asked myself.'

"'What will you do?'

"'I asked myself that question the morning after the cold I told you of.'

"'And? —' she said, with visible uneasiness.

"'I began to pay court to that little lady whom I had for my substitute.'

"Charlotte sprang up from the sofa like a frightened doe; she trembled like a leaf, as she cast upon me one of those looks in which a woman forgets her dignity, her modesty, her craftiness, even her grace, — the glittering glance of a hunted viper, forced to its hole, — and said: —

"'I, who loved him! I, who struggled! I, who —'

"On that third idea, which I leave you to guess, she made the finest organ pause ears ever listened to.

"'Good heavens!' she cried, 'how wretched women are! We are never truly loved. There is nothing real to men in the purest sentiments. But, let me tell you, though you trick us, you are still our dupes.'

"'So I see,' I said with a contrite air. 'You have too much wit in your anger for your heart to suffer much.'

"This modest sarcasm redoubled her wrath; she now shed tears of rage.

"'You have degraded life and the world in my eyes,' she said; 'you have torn away all my illusions, you have depraved my heart —'

"In short, she said to me all that I had the right to say to her, with a bare-faced simplicity, a naïve effrontery, which would certainly have got the better of any man but me.

"'What will become of us, poor hapless women, in the social life which Louis XVIII.'s Charter has created for us? Yes, we were born to suffer. As for love, we are always above you, and you are always below us in loyalty. None of you have honesty in your hearts. For you, love is a game in which you think it fair to cheat.'

"'Dear,' I said, 'to take things seriously in our present social life would be to play at perfect love with an actress.'

"'What infamous treachery!' she cried. 'So this has all been reasoned out?'

"'No; it is simply reasonable.'

"'Farewell, Monsieur de Marsay,' she said; 'you have deceived me shamefully.'

"'Will Madame la duchesse,' I asked in a submissive manner, 'remember Charlotte's wrongs?'

"'Assuredly,' she said in a bitter tone.

"'So then, you detest me?'

"She inclined her head; and I left her to a sentiment which allowed her to think that she had something to avenge. My friends, I have deeply studied the lives of men who have had success with women;

and I feel sure that neither the Maréchal de Richelieu, nor Lauzun, nor Louis de Valois ever made, for the first time, so able a retreat. As for my own heart and mind, they were formed then and forever; and the control I gained over the unreflecting impulses which cause us to commit so many follies gave me the coolness and self-possession which you know of."

"How I pity the second woman!" said the Baronne de Nucingen.

An almost imperceptible smile which flickered for a moment on de Marsay's pale lips made Delphine de Nucingen color.

"How people forget!" cried the Baron de Nucingen.

The naïveté of the celebrated banker had such success that his wife, who had been that "second" of de Marsay, could not help laughing with the rest of the company.

"You are all disposed to condemn that woman," said Lady Dudley, "but I can understand why she should not consider her marriage in the light of an inconstancy. Men never will distinguish between constancy and fidelity. I knew the woman whose history Monsieur de Marsay has just related; she was one of the last of your great ladies."

"Alas! you are right there," said de Marsay. "For the last fifty years we have been taking part in the steady destruction of all social distinctions. We

ought to have saved women from the great shipwreck, but the Civil Code has passed its level over their heads. However terrible the words may be, they must be said; the duchess is disappearing, and so is the marquise. As for baronesses (I ask pardon of Madame de Nucingen, who will make herself a true countess when her husband becomes peer of France), the baronesses have never been regarded seriously."

"Aristocracy begins with the viscountess," remarked Blondet, smiling.

"Countesses will remain," said de Marsay. "An elegant woman will always be more or less a countess, — countess of the Empire, or of yesterday, countess of the *vieille roche*, or, as they say in Italy, countess of civility. But as for the *great lady*, she is dead, — dead with the grandiose surroundings of the last century; dead with her powder, *mouches*, and high-heeled slippers, and her busked corset adorned with its delta of flowing ribbons. Duchesses in the present day can pass through ordinary doors that are not widened to admit a hoop. The Empire saw the last of the trained gowns. Napoleon little imagined the effects of the Code of which he was so proud. That man, by creating *his* duchesses, generated the race of *comme il faut* women whom we see to-day, — the resulting product of his legislation."

"Thought, used as a hammer by the lad leaving

school and the nameless journalist, has demolished the splendors of the social state," said the Comte de Vandenesse. "To-day, any absurd fellow who can hold his head above a collar, cover his manly breast with half a yard of satin in the form of a waistcoat, present a brow shining with apocryphal genius under his frizzed hair, and blunder along in varnished pumps and silk socks costing half a dozen francs, now wears a glass in the arch of one eye by squeezing his cheek against it and, — whether he 's a lawyer's clerk, the son of a contractor, or a banker's bastard, — ogles impertinently the prettiest duchess, rates her charms as she comes down the staircase of a theatre, and says to his friend (clothed by Buisson, like the rest of us), 'There, my dear fellow, is a *comme il faut* woman.'"

"You have never made yourselves," said Lord Dudley, "into a party; it will be long now before you have any place politically. A great deal has been said in France about organizing labor, but property has never yet organized. Here is what is happening to you: A duke, no matter who (there were still a few under Louis XVIII. and Charles X. who possessed two hundred thousand francs a year, a splendid mansion, and a retinue of servants), — that duke could still behave like a great seigneur. The last of these great French lords is the Prince de Talleyrand. This duke dies, and, let us suppose, leaves four chil-

dren, two of whom are daughters. Each of these heirs, supposing that he has managed to marry them well, will inherit, at most, sixty to eighty thousand francs a year; each is father or mother of several children, consequently obliged to live on one floor, probably the ground-floor, of a house, with the strictest economy, — it may be that they are even obliged to borrow money. The wife of the eldest son, who is a duchess in name only, has neither carriage, nor servants, nor opera-box, nor time of her own; she has n't even her own suite of rooms in a family mansion, nor her own fortune, nor her personal baubles. She is buried in marriage as a wife of the rue Saint Denis is buried in commerce; she buys the socks of her dear little babes, feeds and teaches her daughters, whom she no longer puts to school in a convent. Your women of rank simply sit upon their nests."

"Alas, yes!" said Joseph Bridau. "Our epoch no longer possesses those exquisite feminine flowers which adorned the great centuries of the French monarchy. The fan of the great lady is broken. Woman no longer blushes, whispers sly malice, hides her face behind her fan only to show it, — the fan serves merely to fan her! When a thing is no longer anything but what it *is*, it is too useful to belong to luxury."

"Everything in France has assisted in producing the *comme il faut* woman," said Daniel d'Arthèz.

"The aristocracy has consented to this state of things by retreating to its estates to hide and die, — emigrating to the interior before ideas as formerly it emigrated to foreign parts before the populace. Women who could have founded European salons, controlled opinion and turned it like a glove, who should have ruled the world by guiding the men of art and thought who outwardly ruled it, have committed the fatal blunder of abandoning their ground, ashamed to have to struggle with a bourgeoisie intoxicated by power and making its début on the world's stage only, perhaps, to be hacked in pieces by the barbarians who are at its heels. Where the bourgeois affects to see princesses, there are none but so-called fashionable women. Princes no longer find great ladies to distinguish; they cannot even render famous a woman taken from the ranks. The Duc de Bourbon was the last prince to use that privilege."

"And Heaven knows what it cost him!" said Lord Dudley.

"The press follows suit," remarked Rastignac. "Women no longer have the charm of spoken *feuilletons*, delightful satires uttered in choicest language. In like manner we now-a-days read *feuilletons* written in a *patois* which changes every three years, and "little journals," as lively as undertakers, and as light as the lead of their own type. French conversa-

tion is now carried on in revolutionary Iroquois from end to end of France, where the long printed columns of the newspapers take the place in ancient mansions of those brilliant coteries of men and women who *conversed* there in former days."

"The knell of Great Society has sounded, do you know it?" said a Russian prince; "and the first stroke of its iron tongue is your modern French term, *femme comme il faut*."

"You are right, prince," said de Marsay. "That woman, issuing from the ranks of the nobility, or growing from the bourgeoisie, coming from any and every region, even the provinces, is the expression of the spirit of our day, — a last image of good taste, wit, intellect, grace, and distinction united, but all diminishing. We shall see no more *grandes dames* in France, but for a long time still to come there will be *comme il faut* women, sent by public opinion to the Upper Feminine Chamber, — women who will be to the fair sex what the 'gentleman' is among his fellows in England."

"And they call that progress!" said Mademoiselle des Touches. "I would like to know what progress is."

"*This*," said Madame de Nucingen: "Formerly a woman might have the voice of a fish-wife, the walk of a grenadier, the forehead of the boldest hussy, a

fat foot, a thick hand, but nevertheless that woman was a 'great lady'; but now, be she a Montmorency, — if the Demoiselles de Montmorency could ever have such attributes, — she would *not* be a woman *comme il faut.*"

"What is meant by a woman *comme il faut?*" asked Comte Adam Laginski, naïvely.

"She 's a modern creation, a deplorable triumph of the elective system applied to the fair sex," said de Marsay. "Every revolution has its term, or saying, in which it is summed up and described. Our social revolution has ended in the *comme il faut* woman."

"You are right," said the Russian prince, who had come to Paris to make himself a literary reputation. "To explain certain terms or sayings added century by century to your noble language, would be to write a glorious history. *Organize*, for instance, is the word of the Empire; it contains Napoleon — the whole of him."

"But all that is not telling us what you mean by the woman *comme il faut*," cried the young Pole, with some impatience.

"I 'll explain her to you," said Émile Blondet. "On a fine morning you are lounging about Paris. It is more than two o'clock, but not yet five. You see a woman coming towards you; the first glance you cast upon her is like the preface to a fine book; it makes

you anticipate a world of refined and elegant things. Like the botanist crossing hill and vale as he herborizes, among all varieties of Parisian commonness you have found a rare flower. Either this woman is accompanied by two very distinguished-looking men, one of whom is decorated, or by a footman in undress livery who follows her at a little distance. She wears neither startling colors, nor open-worked stockings, nor over-ornamental buckles, nor drawers with embroidered frills visible at her ancles. You notice that her shoes are either prunella, with strings crossed on the instep over thread stockings of extreme fineness, or gray silk stockings that are perfectly plain; or else she wears dainty little boots of exquisite simplicity. Some pretty and not expensive stuff makes you notice her gown, the shape of which surprises the bourgeoises; it is almost always a pelisse, fastened by knots of ribbon and delicately edged with a silken cord or an almost imperceptible binding. The lady has an art of her own in putting on a shawl or a mantle; she knows how to wrap it from her waist to her throat, forming a sort of carapace which would make a bourgeoise look like a tortoise, but under which the *comme il faut* woman contrives to indicate a beautiful figure while concealing it. How? by what means? That is a secret which she keeps, without the protection of any patent. She walks with a certain concen-

tric and harmonious motion, which makes her sweet alluring figure quiver under the stuffs as an adder at mid-day makes the green turf above him move. Does she owe to angel or devil that graceful undulation which plays beneath the black silk mantle, sways the lace of its border, and sheds a balmy air which I shall venture to call the breeze-Parisian. You remark upon her arms, about her waist, around her neck, a science of folds draping even a restive stuff, which reminds you of the antique Mnemosyne. Ah! how well she understands — forgive me the expression — the methods of gait. Examine well the way in which she advances her foot, moulding an outline beneath her gown with a decent precision which excites the admiration, restrained by respect, of those who pass her. If an Englishwoman tried that walk she would look like a grenadier marching to the assault of a redoubt. To the woman of Paris belongs the genius of gait. The municipality has long owed her our coming asphalt pavements. You will observe that this lady jostles no one. In order to pass, she stands still, waiting with proud modesty until way is made for her. Her attitude, both tranquil and disdainful, obliges the most insolent dandy to step aside. Her bonnet, of remarkable simplicity, has fresh strings. Possibly, there may be flowers upon it; but the cleverest of these women wear only ribbons. Feathers require a

carriage, flowers attract the eye. Beneath the bonnet you see the cool and restful face of a woman who is sure of herself, but without self-conceit; who looks at nothing, but sees all; and whose vanity, lulled by continual gratification, gives to her countenance an expression of indifference which piques curiosity. She knows she is being studied; she is well aware that nearly every one, even women, turn round to look at her. She passes through Paris like a film of gossamer, as white and as pearly. This beautiful species of the sex prefers the warmest latitudes and the cleanest longitudes in Paris; you will therefore find her between the 10th and the 110th arcade of the rue de Rivoli, along the line of the boulevards, from the equator of the Panorama, where the productions of the Indies flourish and the finest creations of industry are blooming, to the cape of the Madeleine; you will find her also in the least muddy regions of the bourgeoisie, between number 30 and number 150 of the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. During the winter she takes her pleasure on the terrace of the Feuillants, and not upon the bituminous pavements which skirt it. According to weather, she glides through the alleys of the Champs Élysées. Never will you meet this charming variety of womankind in the hyperboreal regions of the rue Saint-Denis, never in the Kamtschatka of muddy streets small and commercial, and never any-

where in rainy weather. These flowers of Paris, opening to the sun, perfume the promenades and fold their leaves by five in the afternoon like a convolvulus. The women whom you will see later having slightly the same air and trying to imitate them are another race. This fair unknown, the Beatrice of our day is the *comme il faut* woman.

"It is not always easy, my dear count," said Blondet, interrupting himself for a moment, "for foreigners to perceive the differences by which a connoisseur emeritus distinguishes the two species, for women are born comedians. But those differences strike the eye of all Parisians: hooks are visible, tapes show their yellowish white through a gap at the back of the gown; shoes are worn at heel, bonnet strings have been ironed, the gown puffs out too much, the bustle is flattened. You notice a sort of effort in the premeditated lowering of the eyelids. The attitude is conventional. As for the bourgeoise, it is impossible to confound her with the woman who is *comme il faut;* she makes an admirable foil to her, she explains the charm the unknown lady has cast upon you. The bourgeoise is busy; she is out in all weathers; comes and goes and trots; is undecided whether she will, or whether she will not enter a shop. Where the *comme il faut* woman knows perfectly well what she wants and what she means to do, the bourgeoise is undecided, pulls up

her gown to cross a gutter, drags a child after her, and is forced to watch for carriages; she is a mother in public and lectures her daughter; carries money in a handbag and wears open-work stockings, a boa above a fur cape in winter, and a shawl with a scarf in summer, — the bourgeoise is an adept at the pleonasms of the toilet. As for your Beatrice, you will find her in the evening at the Opera, or in a ballroom. She then appears under an aspect so different that you fancy her two creations without analogy. The woman has issued from her morning vestments like a butterfly from its larva. She serves, as a dainty to your raptured eyes, the form which her shawl scarce outlined in the morning. At the theatre the woman of society never goes higher than the second tier of boxes, unless at the Italian opera. You can therefore study at your ease the judicious slowness of her movements. This adorable manœuvrer uses all the little artifices of woman's policy with a natural ease that precludes the idea of art and premeditation. Is her hand royally beautiful, the most suspicious man would believe it absolutely necessary to roll, or fasten up, or toss aside whichever ringlet or curl she may touch. Has she nobility of profile, you will think she is merely giving irony or charm to what she says to her neighbor, by turning her head in a manner to produce that magic effect, so dear to great painters, which

draws the light to the cheek, defines the nose with a clear outline, illumines the pink of the nostril, carves the forehead with sharp prominence, and leaves a touch of high light on the chin. If she has a pretty foot she throws herself on a sofa with the coquetry of a cat in the sunshine, her feet forward, without your seeing anything more in that pretty pose than a charming model for lassitude offered to a sculptor. No other woman but the woman *comme il faut* is ever perfectly at her ease in her clothes; nothing disturbs her. You will never see her putting in place, like a bourgeoise, a recalcitrant shoulder-knot, or looking to see if the lace of her chemisette accomplishes its office of unfaithful guardian to the sparkling whiteness of her bosom; never will you find her looking in a mirror to discover if her coiffure is perfectly intact. Her toilet is always in harmony with her character; she has had time to study herself and to decide what suits her; she has long known what does not suit her. You never see her when the audience of a theatre disperses; she departs before the end of the play. If by chance she is seen, calm and sedate, upon the steps of the staircase, some powerful sentiment has prompted her. She is there to order; she has some look to give, some promise to receive. Perhaps she is descending slowly to gratify the vanity of a slave whom she occasionally obeys. If you meet her in society, at a ball or a

soirée, you will gather the honey, real or affected, of her practised voice; you will be enchanted with her empty talk, to which she contrives to impart the semblance of thought with inimitable skill — "

"Then it is n't necessary for the *comme il faut* woman to have intellect?" said the young Polish count.

"It is impossible to be that kind of woman without taste," said the Princesse de Cadignan.

"And to have taste is, in France, to have more than mind," said the Russian prince.

"The mind of this woman is the triumph of an art that is wholly plastic," replied Blondet. "You don't know what she says, but you are charmed. She has nodded her head or sweetly shrugged her handsome shoulders, or gilded some meaningless phrase with a smile or a charming pout, or put Voltaire's epigram into an 'Oh!' an 'Ah!' an 'Is it possible?' The turn of her head is an active interrogation; she gives meaning of some kind to the movement with which she dances a vinaigrette fastened by a chain to her finger. These are artificial great effects obtained by superlatively small ones: she lets her hand fall nobly from the arm of her chair, and all is said; she has rendered judgment without appeal fit to move the most insensible. She has listened to you, she has given you an opportunity to show your wit; and — I

appeal to your modesty — such moments in society are rare."

The innocent air of the young Pole whom Blondet was addressing made every one laugh heartily.

"You can't talk half an hour with a bourgeoise before she brings to light her husband under one form or another," continued Blondet, whose gravity did not give way; "but if your *comme il faut* woman is married she has the tact to conceal her husband, and the labor of Christopher Columbus would hardly enable you to discover him. If you have not been able to question others on this point, you will see her toward the end of the evening fix her eyes steadily on a man of middle age, who inclines his head and leaves the room; she has told her husband to call up the carriage, and she departs. In her own house no *comme il faut* woman is ever visible before four o'clock, the hour at which she receives. She is wise enough to make you wait even then. You will find good taste throughout her house; her luxury is intended for use, and is renewed when needful; you will see nothing there under glass cases, nor any swathings of protective gauze. The staircase is warm; flowers gladden you everywhere; flowers are the only presents she accepts, and those from a few persons only; bouquets give pleasure and live for a single day and are then renewed. To her they are, as in the East, a symbol and a promise.

The costly trifles of fashion are spread about, but her salons are not turned into a museum or an old curiosity shop. You will find her seated on a sofa at the corner of the fireplace, whence she will bow to you without rising. Her conversation is no longer that of the ballroom; in her own house she is bound to entertain you. The *comme il faut* woman possesses all these shades of behaviour in perfection. She welcomes in you a man who will swell the circle of her society, the great object of the cares and anxieties of all women of the world. Consequently, to attach you to her salon she will make herself charmingly coquettish. You will feel above all, in that salon, how isolated women are in the present day and why they endeavor to have a little society about them in which they can shine as constellations. But this is the death of conversation; conversation is impossible without generalities."

"Yes," said de Marsay, "you have seized upon the great defect of our epoch. Epigram, that book in a word, no longer falls, as in the eighteenth century, on persons and on things, but on petty events and dies with the day."

"The wit of the *comme il faut* woman, when she has any," resumed Blondet, "consists in putting a doubt on everything, while the bourgeoise uses hers to affirm everything. There lies a great difference

between the two women. The bourgeoise is certain of her virtue; the *comme il faut* woman is not sure if she has any yet, or if she has always had it. This hesitation about all things is one of the last graces our horrible epoch has granted her. She seldom goes to church, but she will talk religion to you and try to convert you, if you have the good sense to play the free thinker, for that will open the way to the stereotyped phrases, the motions of the head and the gestures which belong to such women: 'Ah, fy! I thought you had more intelligence than to attack religion. Society is crumbling already and you remove its prop. But religion at this moment is you and I, it is property, it is the future of our children! Ah! let us not be egotists. Individualism is the disease of our epoch, and religion is the sole remedy; it unites the families that your laws disunite,' etc., etc. She begins in this way a neo-Christian sermon sprinkled with political ideas, which is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but moral (oh! devilishly moral), in which you will find scraps of every stuff that modern doctrines driven to bay have woven."

The women present could not help laughing at the mincing affectations of their sex with which Émile Blondet illustrated his sarcasms.

"Those remarks, my dear Comte Adam," said Blondet, looking at the young Pole, "will show you

that the *comme il faut* woman represents intellectual hotch-potch as well as political jumble; just as she lives surrounded by the brilliant but not lasting products of modern industry, which aims at the destruction of its work in order to replace it. You will leave her house saying to yourself, 'She has, decidedly, very superior ideas;' and you think so all the more because she has sounded your heart and mind with a delicate hand; she has sought your secrets, — for the *comme il faut* woman feigns ignorance of everything, in order to discover everything; but she is discreet; there are things she never knows, however well she may know them. Nevertheless you will feel uneasy, you are ignorant of the real state of her heart. Formerly the great ladies loved openly. banners displayed; now the woman *comme il faut* has her little passion ruled like a sheet of music paper with its crotchets and quavers, its minims, rests, and sharps and flats. Always weak, she will neither sacrifice her love, her husband, nor the future of her children. She 's a woman of jesuitical middle-paths, of squint-eyed temporizing with conventions, of unavowed passions carried along between two breakwaters. She fears her servants like an Englishwoman who sees before her the perspective of a divorce suit. This woman, so apparently at her ease in a ballroom, so charming on the street, is a slave at home. She has

no independence, unless locked in with her own ideas. She is determined to remain outwardly the woman *comme il faut*. That 's her theory of life. A woman separated from her husband, reduced to a pittance, without carriage or luxury or opera-box, is to-day neither wife, maid, nor bourgeoise; she dissolves, she becomes a thing. What is to become of her? The Carmelites won't take married women; will her lover always want her? that 's a question. Therefore the *comme il faut* woman may sometimes give rise to calumny, but never to condemnation."

"That is all true, horribly true," said the Princesse de Cadignan.

"Consequently, the *comme il faut* woman," continued Blondet, "lives between English hypocrisy and the frankness of the eighteenth century, — a bastard system emblematic of a period when nothing that comes is like that which goes, when transitions lead nowhere, when the great figures of the past are blotted out, and distinctions are purely personal. In my opinion it is impossible for a woman, even though she be born on the steps of a throne, to acquire before the age of twenty-five, the encyclopedic science of nothings, the art of manœuvring, the various great little things, — music of the voice, harmonies of color, angelic deviltries and innocent profligacy, the language and the silence, the gravity and the folly,

the wit and the dulness, the diplomacy and the ignorance which constitute the woman *comme il faut.*"

"Accepting the description you have just given of her," said Mademoiselle des Touches to Émile Blondet, "where do you class the woman-author? Is *she* a woman *comme il faut?*"

"When she is not gifted with genius, she is a woman *comme il n'en faut pas,*" replied Émile Blondet, accompanying his answer with a glance which might pass for a frank compliment to Camille Maupin. "But that is not my saying; it belongs to Napoleon, who hated women of genius," he added.

"Don't be too hard on Napoleon," said Canalis, with an emphatic tone and gesture. "It was one of his littlenesses — for he had them — to be jealous of literary fame. Who can explain, or describe, or comprehend Napoleon? — a man represented always with folded arms, who yet did all things; who was the greatest known Power, the most concentrated power, the most corrosive and acid of all powers; a strong genius which led an armed civilization throughout the world and fixed it nowhere; a man who could do all because he willed all; prodigious phenomenon of Will! — subduing disease by a battle, yet doomed to die of disease in his bed after living unscathed amid cannon-balls and bullets; a man who had in his head a Code and a Sword, word and action; a

clear-sighted mind which divined all except his own fall; a capricious politician who played his soldiers like pawns and yet respected three heads, Talleyrand, Pozzo di Borgo, and Metternich, diplomatists whose death would have saved the French Empire, but whose life seemed to him of more value than that of thousands of soldiers; a man to whom, by some rare privilege nature had left a heart in his iron body; a man at midnight kind and laughing among women, and the next day handling Europe without gloves; hypocritical and generous; loving meretriciousness and simplicity; without taste, but protecting Art; and, in spite of these antitheses, grand in all things by instinct or by organization; Cæsar at twenty-five years of age, Cromwell at thirty, but a good husband and a good father like any bourgeois of Père Lachaise; a man who improvised great public buildings, empires, kings, codes, poems, and one romance, and all with greater range than accuracy. Did he not attempt to make Europe France; and after bearing our weight upon the earth until it changed the laws of gravitation, has he not left us poorer than the day he put his hand upon us? He who made an empire with his name, lost that name on the borders of his empire in a sea of blood and slaughtered men. A man all thought and action, who was able to comprehend both Desaix and Fouché."

"Despotic power and legal justice, each in due season, makes the true king," said de Marsay.

"But," said the Princesse de Cadignan, addressing the other women with a smile both dubious and satirical, "have we women really deteriorated as these gentlemen seem to think? Because to-day, under a system which belittles everything, you men like little dishes, little apartments, little paintings, little journals, little books, is that any reason why women should be less grand than they have been? Does the human heart change because you change your habits? At all epochs passions remain the same. I know splendid devotions, sublime endurances which lack publicity, — fame if you prefer to call it so. Many a woman is not less an Agnes Sorel because she never saved a king of France. Do you think our Marquise d'Espard worth less than Madame Doublet or Madame du Deffand, in whose salon so much harm was said and done? Is n't Taglioni the equal of Camargo? and Malibran of Saint-Huberti? Are not our poets superior to those of the eighteenth century? If, at this moment, thanks to the grocers who govern us, we have no style of our own, did n't the Empire have a style as fully its own as that of Louis XV.? And its splendor was surely fabulous. Have the arts and sciences lost ground?"

"I agree with you, madame," said Général de

Montriveau. "In my opinion the women of this epoch are truly great. When posterity gives a verdict upon us will not Madame Recamier's fame be equal to that of the loveliest women of past ages? We have made history so fast that we lack historians to write it down. The reign of Louis XIV. had but one Madame de Sévigné, while we have a thousand to-day in Paris who can write better letters, but do not publish them. Whether the French woman calls herself *femme comme il faut* or great lady, she will always be the pre-eminent woman. Émile Blondet has made us a picture of the manners and charms of a woman of the present day; but, if occasion offered, this mincing, affected being, who plays a part and warbles out the ideas of Monsieur this, that, and the other, would show herself heroic! Even your faults, mesdames, seem the more poetic because they are and always will be hedged about with great dangers. I have seen much of the world, perhaps I have studied it too late; but, under circumstances in which the illegality of your sentiments might find excuse, I have always observed the effects of some chance, — you may call it Providence if you like, — which fatally overtake those women whom we call frail."

"I hope," said Madame de Camps, "that we are able to be great otherwise."

"Oh, let the Marquis de Montriveau preach to us!" cried Madame de Sérizy.

"All the more because he has preached by example," said the Baronne de Nucingen.

"Alas!" said Général de Montriveau, "of the many dramas, — that 's a word you are constantly using," he said with a nod to Blondet, "in which to my knowledge the finger of God has showed itself, the most terrible was one that was partly my own doing."

"Oh, tell it to us!" cried Lady Barimore. "I love to shudder."

"The taste of a virtuous woman," said de Marsay replying to the charming daughter of Lord Dudley.

"During the campaign of 1812," said General de Montriveau, "I was the involuntary cause of a fearful misfortune, which may serve you, Docteur Bianchon," he said, turning to me, — "you, who take so much note of the human mind while you study the human body, — to solve certain of your enigmas concerning the will. I was making my second campaign; I liked the peril and I laughed at everything, simple young lieutenant of artillery that I was! When we reached the Beresina the army no longer kept, as you know, any discipline; military obedience was at an end. A crowd of men of all nations was making its way instinctively from north to south. Soldiers drove their barefooted and ragged general from their camp-fires if he brought them neither wood nor provisions. After the passage

of that famous river, the disorder was lessened. I came out quietly, alone, without food, from the marshes of Zembin, and I walked along looking for a house where some one might be willing to admit me. Finding none all day, being driven from those I came to, I fortunately saw late in the evening a miserable little Polish farmhouse, of which I can give you no idea unless you have seen the wooden houses of lower Normandy or the poorest hovels of La Beauce. These Polish dwellings consist of a single room, one end of which is divided off by a plank partition and serves as a storehouse for forage. I saw in the twilight a light smoke rising from this building, and hoping to find comrades more compassionate than the persons I had hitherto addressed, I marched boldly to the door. Entering, I found a table spread. Several officers, among whom was a woman (a not unusual sight), were eating potatoes and horse-flesh broiled on the embers, and frozen beetroot. I recognized two or three captains of artillery belonging to the regiment in which I had first served. I was received with a volley of acclamations which would greatly have surprised me on the other side of the Beresina; but at this moment the cold was less intense, my comrades were resting, they were warm, they were eating, and piles of straw at the end of the room offered them the perspective of a delightful night. We did n't ask for

much in those days. My comrades could be philanthropic gratis, — a very common way of being philanthropic, by the bye. At the end of the table, near the door which led into the small room filled with straw and hay, I saw my former colonel, one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met in the varied collection of men it has been my lot to know. He was an Italian. Whenever human beings are beautiful in southern countries they are sublimely beautiful. Have you ever remarked the singular whiteness of Italians when they are white? It is magnificent, especially in the light. When I read the fantastic portrait Charles Nodier has given us of Colonel Oudet, I found my own sensations expressed in every sentence. Italian, like most of the officers of his regiment, — borrowed by the Emperor from the army of Prince Eugène, — my colonel was a man of great height, admirably proportioned, possibly a trifle too stout, but amazingly vigorous and light, agile as a greyhound. His black hair, curling profusely, set into brilliant relief a clear white skin like that of a woman. He had handsome feet, small hands, a charming mouth, and an aquiline nose with delicate lines, the tip of which contracted naturally and turned white when he was angry, which was often. His irascibility so passed all belief that I shall tell you nothing about it; you shall judge for yourself. No one was ever at ease in his presence.

Perhaps I was the only man who did not fear him. It is true that he had taken a singular liking to me; he thought whatever I did was good. When anger worked within him, his forehead contracted, his muscles stood out in the middle of it like the horse-shoe of Redgauntlet. That sign would have terrified you more than the magnetic lightning of his blue eyes. His whole body would then quiver, and his strength, already so great in his normal condition, passed all bounds. He rolled his *r*'s excessively. His voice, certainly as powerful as that of Charles Nodier's Oudet, gave an indescribable richness of sound to the syllable which contained that consonant. Though this vice of pronunciation was, in him, and at all times, a charm, you cannot imagine the power that accent, considered so vulgar in Paris, was capable of expressing when he commanded a manœuvre, or was in any way excited. You must have heard it to understand it. When the colonel was tranquil his blue eyes were full of angelic sweetness; his pure brow sparkled with an expression that was full of charm. At a parade of the Army of Italy no man could compare with him. Even d'Orsay himself, the handsome d'Orsay, was vanquished by our colonel at the last review held by Napoleon before his entrance into Russia. In this gifted man all was contradiction. Passion lives by contrasts. Therefore do not ask me whether he was

conscious of those irresistible influences to which our nature" (the general looked toward the Princesse de Cadignan) "bends like molten glass beneath the blower's pipe; but it so chanced that by some singular fatality the colonel had had but few love-affairs, or had neglected to have them. To give you an idea of his violence, I will tell you in two words what I once saw him do in a paroxysm of anger. We were marching with our cannon along a very narrow road, bordered on one side by woods and on the other by a rather steep bank. Half way along this road we met another regiment of artillery, its colonel marching with it. This colonel wanted to make the captain of our regiment at the head of the first battery give way to his troop. Naturally our captain refused. But the colonel of the other regiment made a sign to his first battery to advance, and in spite of the care the first driver took to keep close into the woods the wheel of the gun carriage caught the right leg of our captain, broke it, and flung him to the other side of his horse. It was done in a moment. Our colonel, who happened to be at a little distance, saw the quarrel, and galloped furiously up through the trees and among the wheels at the risk of being flung with all his hoofs in the air, reaching the spot in face of the other colonel just as the captain cried out, 'To me!' and fell. No! our Italian colonel was no longer a man. Foam, like that

of champagne, boiled from his mouth, he growled like a lion. Incapable of uttering a word, even a cry, he made a dreadful sign to his adversary, pointing to the wood, and drew his sabre. They entered it. In two seconds we saw the other colonel on the ground with his head split in two. The soldiers of that regiment retreated, ha! the devil! and in quick time, too! Our captain, who just missed being killed, and who was yelping in the ditch where the wheel of the gun-carriage had flung him, had a wife, a charming Italian woman from Messina, who was not indifferent to our colonel. This circumstance had greatly increased his fury. His protection was due to the husband; he was bound to defend him as well as the wife. Now, in the miserable Polish cabin this side of Zembin, where, as I told you, I received such cordial welcome, this very captain sat opposite to me, and his wife was at the other end of the table opposite to the colonel. She was a little woman, named Rosina, very dark, but bearing in her black eyes, shaped like almonds, all the ardour of the sun of Sicily. At this moment she was deplorably thin, her cheeks were covered with dust like a peach exposed to the weather on a high-road. Scarcely clothed and all in rags, wearied by marches, her hair in disorder beneath the fragment of a shawl tied across her head, there was still all the presence of a woman about her; her move-

ments were pretty, her rosy, dimpled mouth, her white teeth, the lines of her face and bust, — charms which misery, cold, and want of care had not entirely effaced, — still told of love and sweetness to any one whose mind could dwell upon a woman. Rosina evidently possessed one of those natures which are fragile in appearance, but are full of nervous strength. The face of the husband, a Piedmontese nobleman, expressed a sort of jeering good-humor, if it is permissible to ally the two words. Brave, intelligent and educated, he nevertheless seemed to ignore the relations which had existed between his wife and the colonel for nearly three years. I attributed this indifference to the singular customs of Italy, or to some secret in their own home; but there was in the man's face one feature which had always inspired me with involuntary distrust. His underlip, thin and very flexible, turned down at its two extremities instead of turning up, which seemed to me to reveal an underlying cruelty in a character apparently phlegmatic and indolent. You can well imagine that the conversation was not brilliant when I entered. My weary comrades were eating in silence, but they naturally asked me a few questions; and we related our several misfortunes, mingling them with reflections on the campaign, the generals, their blunders, the Russians, and the cold. Soon after my arrival, the

colonel, having finished his meagre meal, wiped his moustache, wished us good-night, cast his black eye toward the woman, and said, 'Rosina.' Then without awaiting any reply he went into the space partitioned off for forage. The meaning of his summons was evident; and the young woman made an indescribable gesture, which expressed both the annoyance that she felt at seeing her dependence thus exhibited without respect for human feelings, and her sense of the affront offered to her dignity as a woman and to her husband. And yet in the strained expression of her features and in the violent contraction of her eyebrows, there seemed to be a sort of foreboding; perhaps a presentiment of her fate came over her. Rosina continued to sit tranquilly at the table; a moment later the colonel's voice was heard repeating her name, 'Rosina!' The tone of this new summons was even more brutal than that of the first. The rolling accent of the colonel's voice and the echo which the Italian language gives to vowels and final letters revealed in a startling manner the despotism, impatience, and will of that man. Rosina turned pale, but she rose, passed behind us, and joined the colonel. All my comrades maintained a rigid silence; but I, unhappily, after looking round at them, began to laugh, and the laugh was then repeated from mouth to mouth. 'You laugh?' said the husband. 'Faith, comrade,' I

replied, becoming serious, 'I did wrong, I admit it; I ask ten thousand pardons; and if you are not content with such excuses I am ready to give you satisfaction.' 'It is not you who have done wrong, it is I,' he replied coldly. Thereupon we all shook down our straw about the room and were soon lost in the sleep of weariness. The next day each man, without awaking his neighbor, without looking for a journeying companion, started on his way with that utter egotism which made our retreat from Russia one of the most horrible dramas of personality, sadness, and horror which ever took place beneath the heavens. Yet after each man had gone some seven or eight hundred yards from our night's lodging, we came together and marched along like geese led in flocks by the unconscious despotism of a child. A common necessity was driving us along. When we reached a slight elevation from which we could see the house where we had passed the night, we heard sounds that resembled the roaring of lions in the desert or the bellowing of bulls; but no! that clamor could not be compared to any known sound. Mingled with that horrible and sinister roar came the feeble cry of a woman. We all turned round, seized with a sensation — I know not how to describe it — of fear; the house was no longer visible, only a burning pile; the building, which some one had barricaded, was in flames. Clouds of

smoke, driven by the wind, rolled towards us, bringing raucous sounds and a strong indescribable odor. A few steps from us marched the captain, who had quietly joined our caravan; we looked at him in silence, for none of us dared question him. But he, divining our curiosity, touched his breast with the forefinger of his right hand and pointed with the left to the conflagration. 'Son' io!' he said. We continued our way without another word to him."

"There is nothing more fearful than the revolt of sheep," said de Marsay.

"It would be too dreadful to let us part with that horrible scene in our minds," said Madame de Montcornet. "I shall dream of it."

"Tell us, before we go, what punishment befel Monsieur de Marsay's first love," said Lord Dudley, smiling.

"When Englishmen jest their foils are buttoned," remarked Émile Blondet.

"Monsieur Bianchon can tell you that," replied de Marsay, turning to me. "He saw her die."

"Yes," I said, "and her death was one of the most beautiful I ever witnessed. The duke and I had passed the night beside the pillow of the dying woman, whose disease, consumption, was then in its final stages; no hope remained, and she had received the last offices of the Church the preceding evening. The

duke had fallen asleep. Madame la duchesse, waking about four in the morning, made me, in a touching manner and with a smile, a tender little sign to let him sleep; and yet she felt she was about to die! She had reached a stage of extraordinary thinness, but her face preserved its features, and its outlines were truly sublime. Her pallor made her skin resemble porcelain behind which a light has been placed. Her brilliant eyes and the color in her cheeks shone out upon this skin so softly beautiful, while the whole countenance seemed to breathe forth a commanding tranquillity. Evidently she pitied the duke, and the feeling took its rise in a lofty sentiment which seemed to see no limit in the approach of death. The silence was profound. The chamber, softly lighted by a lamp, had the appearance of all sick-chambers at the moment of death. At that instant the clock struck. The duke awoke, and was in despair at having slept. I did not see the gesture of impatience with which he showed the regret he felt at having lost his wife from sight during the few last moments granted to him; but it is certain that any other person than the dying woman might have been mistaken about him. A statesman, preoccupied with the interests of France, the duke had many of those apparent oddities which often make men of genius pass for fools, though the explanation may be found in the exquisite nature and

requirements of their mind. He now took a chair beside the bed and looked fixedly at his wife. The dying woman put out her hand and took that of her husband which she pressed gently, saying in a soft but trembling voice: —

"'My poor friend, who will understand you in future?'

"So saying, she died, looking at him."

"The doctor's stories," said the Duc de Rhétoré, "always leave a deep impression."

"But a tender one," said Mademoiselle des Touches.

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